

FIVE CENTS

BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No. 42

LOUIS STANHOPE,
HERO:

or, The Boy who disappeared

BY
JOHN DE MORGAN

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LOUIS STANHOPE, HERO;

OR,

The Boy Who Disappeared.

By JOHN DE MORGAN.

CHAPTER I.

"SAVE MY DAUGHTER!"

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

The cry rang out with awful significance in the streets of New York one cold, miserable, snowy night in December, 188—

It was an awful night. The snow was drifting in the streets, and as it was blown into the faces of the pedestrians it seemed to cut through the skin.

The wind blew forty miles an hour, and sent the snow eddying round the corners and into every nook and crevice where it could find a resting place.

Along Fifth Avenue a boy walked with slow and almost languid steps.

Louis Stanhope was as miserable as any boy of fifteen could be.

He was alone in the world, and not only alone, but without money, and on that particular evening he had an additional cause for feeling miserable, for he had not eaten anything all day.

Hunger is a great depressor of the spirits, and Louis Stanhope did not care whether he lived or died.

He was dressed neatly, though his clothes were getting rather shiny, but they testified that he had not always been so poor.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

How was it the engines did not rattle along the streets?

Why did the people run, calling out the dread announcement?

The pitiless storm was responsible, for the telegraph wires were down in many places and the fire alarms would not work.

"Fire!"

The word seemed to stir the boy's blood, and he joined the

throng, running as fast as any, in the excitement forgetting all about his hunger and misery.

The crowd increased as the streets were passed, and by the time the fire was reached several hundreds had gathered.

Louis found himself in front of a large hotel, from whose windows the clouds of smoke testified of the awful fire within.

"Clang! Clang! Cling! Clang!"

An engine was coming.

The bell rang, the firemen shouted, a little dog barked, the click-it-a-click of the splendid horses as they galloped over the snow-covered pavement added to the excitement.

From another direction similar sounds were heard, and within a few minutes several fire engines were on the spot.

The chief looked at the building, took its bearings, so to speak, and gave his orders.

The hotel clerk was feeling wretched, for he had dressed himself in full evening suit, with a solitaire in the bosom of his wide expanse of shirt, and he felt sure his efforts had been wasted, for the fire would draw attention away from him.

"Are all the people out?" the chief asked, with a business-like abruptness.

"Yes."

"The building is unoccupied, then? Are the servants out?"

"I really couldn't say," answered the clerk, haughtily.

What were the servants to him?

While the chief was speaking a man was seen descending the marble stairs, with a blanket around his body and a cigar in his mouth.

He had found his room getting too hot, and, after repeated warnings had been given, he cut two holes in the blanket, put his arms through them, and, clad in this impromptu ulster, walked downstairs, crossed the street and entered another hotel a block away.

The flames followed the smoke through the windows, and soon the whole building was like a furnace.

"My daughter! Save my daughter!" cried a man frantically. "Where is she?" asked the chief.

The distracted father pointed to a third-floor window.

"There! In there! Oh, Heaven! they told me she was out."

There was no ladder long enough to reach that window, and the flames below had cut off all access up the stairs.

"Are you sure she is there?"

"Yes, yes! Save her! Oh, please save her!"

A hurried consultation was held, and all declared that it was impossible to reach that window.

"She is dead by this time," suggested one of the firemen.

There wasn't a man there but would have risked his life if he had seen any chance of rescuing the girl, but there appeared to be no chance.

Louis stepped forward, and was about to speak to the chief when the police pushed him violently back.

He forced his way through the crowd and approached the chief from another direction.

Quickly he spoke; he was afraid the police would again interfere.

"Have you a long rope? If so, I think I can save her."

"How?"

"Get me the rope and let me try."

A rope, strong enough to fasten a steamer to a dock, was dragged along.

"No, no; a small rope, like a clothesline."

From a nearby house such a rope was secured and handed to Louis.

On the corner of the street stood a tall telegraph pole.

Louis pushed his way to the pole and began to climb it.

He felt the heat from the burning building blistering his hands and face, the snow nearly blinded his eyes, but he ascended slowly, sometimes slipping and causing the people below to utter exclamations of dismay.

Gradually he rose to the crossbar, from which the wires were strung.

For a few seconds he sat astride the bar, resting.

Then he unfastened the rope from about his waist and secured one end to the bar.

Every one below wondered what he was going to do.

No one, not even the experienced firemen, could imagine.

He was twenty feet away from the window.

The wires passed within ten feet of the front of the hotel, and a little above the window he wished to reach.

Every eye was turned toward him.

The snow blinded the people, but they never wavered in their gaze.

The water from the fire-hose fell into the burning building with hissing, sputtering noise, and clouds of steam rose up to blend with the flame and smoke.

Louis grasped three of the telegraph wires, and dropped from the bar.

"Oh!"

It was almost like a groan which burst from the people as they saw him drop.

But he held firmly with his hands, making his way along the

thin, but strong, wires, which sagged and swayed as he moved along.

He was opposite the window.

With one hand he supported his weight, while with the other he twisted his rope round and round the three wires.

It was done quickly and well, but to the people it seemed an hour since he had left the cross-bar.

Grasping the rope, he relinquished his hold on the wire and slid down some twelve or more feet.

How the wires creaked, and cracked, and sagged with his weight!

He hung suspended from those wires for a few seconds, and then swung himself, at first slowly, to and fro.

Gradually he increased his velocity until he appeared to swing right across the street.

The people saw his object now.

He had touched the window sill once, but had been unable to secure a grip.

A second time he succeeded, and he stood upon the sill.

A wild shout greeted the achievement of the young hero, and the next instant all felt ashamed of having given vent to their emotions.

A silence like that of the dead was on every one.

Louis steadied himself an instant, holding on to the frame of the window.

One false step, one slight shiver even, might precipitate him to the hard pavement beneath, but he never lost his presence of mind.

The engines steamed, and snorted, and puffed as they worked with the power of giants, sending the water into every part of the burning building.

He unfastened the rope from his body and secured it to the window.

On the north side of the hotel there stood a house, whose roof came within ten feet of the attic windows of the ill-fated building.

The firemen had entered the house, and stood on the roof, holding the hose so that the water would play on the hotel.

Jim Fenton, a brave laddie, was standing on the very edge of the roof as steadily as though he had been on the pavement, sixty feet below.

Every one marveled at his courage.

The wind blew the water in every direction, the snow fell about him, blinding him, but his arm never quivered, and he stood as rigid as any statue.

But there came a shock to his nerves which nearly overcame him.

Opposite to him was a dormer window, and in that window there appeared a human face.

Jim Fenton saw it, and turned the nozzle of the hose in another direction.

He looked at the window, and again saw the face.

"Can you not get down the stairs?" he cried, but the wind howled and whistled around the chimneys, and the snow made the air so thick that perhaps his voice was not carried across the ten feet.

"It is a woman!" he thought, "and I must save her. But how?"

All this time he had stood in the narrow gutter on the edge of the roof, without perceptible movement.

Those below who had been watching him saw him stagger.

The hose fell from his hand; he reeled like a drunken man, and, had it not been for Rowley Barnes, a brother fireman, he would have fallen to the street and been killed.

In a moment he recovered himself, and called to Barnes to get a ladder, long enough to cross to the window's opposite.

He picked up the hose, but he was not the same steady man he had been only a few minutes before.

He had seen something which had completely unnerved him.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY OF THE RED HAND.

Louis Stanhope secured the rope, and then, with admirable sang froid, pushed up the window sash and entered the room.

The smoke blinded him.

The heat blistered his face and hands, while he could scarcely breathe.

Closing his eyes for a moment, he tried to overcome the physical inconveniences before he explored the room.

If the girl was there, he feared she must be dead or unconscious, for she had not uttered a sound.

The sensation of being in that room was horrible.

On all sides—above, below—the crackling of wood as it burned, the hissing of the water, the crashing of glass, the falling of portions of the roof and the supports of the stairway, all combined to produce a discord horrible to endure.

Although the night was dark, the blazing building lighted up every portion brighter than gas or electricity had ever done before.

Louis shuddered as he thought of the danger he was in.

It was the first time he had thought of himself.

He opened his eyes and glanced around the smoke-filled room.

He saw the bureau, and on it the jewelry and ornaments which the girl he was trying to save had worn.

Once he thought of gathering all up and putting them in his pocket, but life was more valuable than jewels, and he restrained himself.

He half staggered across the room to where he saw the bed.

On the white-enameled door of the pretty bedroom, one of the choicest in the hotel, he saw something which startled him.

It was an impress of a hand, a human hand, blood-red.

Some one had pressed a hand, red with blood, upon the white paint, and left the impression there.

Could the girl have been murdered?

No; there she was, lying on the bed, partly dressed.

Either she had been overcome before she had entirely disrobed, or else, alarmed by the cry of fire, she had hastened to dress herself and had fallen back on the bed, rendered unconscious by the smoke.

Louis spoke to her, but she did not answer him.

He shook her. She was breathing, so was not dead.

All his efforts failed to arouse her. What could he do?

He was not strong enough to carry her downstairs, even supposing the stairs were still standing.

He raised her to a sitting posture, and again tried to arouse her dormant faculties.

No sign of consciousness was manifest.

The heat was getting unbearable.

The smoke made him cough and sneeze until he thought he should die in one of the paroxysms.

With a determined effort, he raised her from the bed and staggered with her to the window.

How was he to lower her down?

The rope was not long enough to reach the street, and, even if it were, he was not strong enough to hold her as she descended.

Leaving her by the open window, he rushed out into the hall, but only to be beaten back by the flames.

Retreating into the room, he closed the door tightly, bringing into more prominence the Red Hand.

There was something awful in that mysterious symbol, and while it fascinated, it also almost frightened him.

He looked out of the window, and saw the crowds below.

They had given up all hope of seeing him again.

A wild cry arose from the people when he appeared at the window.

"Have you a long ladder yet?" he shouted.

"No. Drop down; we will catch you."

"It's the lady I want to save."

"Is she alive?"

"Yes."

"Tell her to drop. We will catch her."

The chief ordered mattresses to be placed on the pavement, and six stalwart fellows grasped a heavy blanket, ready to receive the girl.

Louis tried to arouse her, but again failed.

He could not lift her high enough to drop her from the window carefully.

"No use!" he cried.

"Can't you get to the roof?"

"No; the fire has burned away the stairs. Stay there. I'll save her or die with her!"

The snow glistened in the red glare of the flames, the wind had moderated somewhat, the engines still sent powerful streams of water into the building, when Louis again fastened the rope around his waist, and, lowering himself from the window, swung off over the heads of the people below.

When the rope steadied itself, he climbed up it to the wires above, then traversed the few feet to the crossbar on the pole to which the other end of his rope was fastened.

The people watched him breathlessly as he unfastened the rope. What was he going to do?

A few seconds of time told them.

He made a slipknot in the end, securing it on the wires.

Working his way along, pulling the rope with him, he again reached the place opposite the window.

Pulling the slipknot tight, so that it drew the three telegraph wires close together, he coiled all the loose rope around his waist, and once more lowered himself to a position where he could again swing to the window.

Never was any one watched more closely than was the young hero who risked his life so often in order to try and save another's.

He reached the window, and uncoiled the rope, fastening it under the girl's arms.

Reaching from the window as far as he could, he cut the rope, and dragged the end into the room.

Securing it, by winding and tying around the foot of the bed, he next lifted up the girl to the window ledge.

He could do no more, but must trust to good fortune.

She fell out with a sickening thud. Fortunately, the rope was slack only a couple of feet or it would have probably broken with the weight.

Using the bed foot as a capstan, he paid out the rope as slowly as possible.

At last every inch of the rope was used, and the girl was still twenty feet from the ground.

A ladder was run up to the wall, and a fireman tried to reach her.

At first he failed, but the wind swayed the rope, and he was able to catch her arm.

Pulling her toward him, he grasped her tightly, calling out to Louis to let go of the rope.

The boy did so, and, amid shouts of joy, the fireman descended with his burden.

All had forgotten Louis.

He was up in that room, without rope or ladder, or apparent chance of escape.

He realized the mistake he had made.

The fireman should have unfastened the rope around the girl's shoulders, and so have left it free for Louis to use in his descent.

"The boy! The boy! Save him!" cried the crowd; but no one could devise a way.

The ladders in use by the fire laddies in those days were not up to date.

Higher buildings had been erected, and the department was in a state of transition.

Louis turned back into the room.

He heard a hammering on the floor above him.

"Who's there?" he called out.

"Any one below?" asked a voice.

"Yes."

"All right; I'll save you."

It was Jim Fenton's voice, and the words were so emphatic that Louis banished all doubts. He knew he would be saved, if human agency could effect it.

Crash! went the plaster, and Louis could see Fenton's hand.

"I will save you."

With herculean strength, the fireman cut away the flooring and ceiling, and soon was standing beside Louis.

"How did you get here—this is not your room?"

"No. I got here to save a young lady."

"Where is she?"

"Safe, I believe; but they got the rope away from me, and—What's the matter?"

Fenton stood in the middle of the room, breathing heavily and laboriously.

He was completely metamorphosed. No longer the cool, calm fireman, but a man whose eyes were staring and bulging from his head, and whose every action betokened the madman.

"That! Look at that! Don't you see it?" he exclaimed, as he pointed to the Red Hand.

"Yes, I see it. What does it mean?"

"Mean? Don't you know? Have you never heard of the Mystery of the Red Hand?"

"No."

"Then you are not afraid?"

"Why should I be?"

"Come, let us get out of this place. I've seen the Red Hand before to-night, and it nearly killed me."

"When? Where? How?" asked Louis, in a breath.

"At a window. I saw a girl's face. There was no girl there, but I saw her, and as she stared at me she held up—a red hand. I thought I should have fallen from the roof."

Louis thought Fenton had become insane, and urged him to escape before the flames cut off the retreat.

The fireman drew himself up to the floor above, and then dragged Louis after him.

The action was none too soon, for a gust of flame burst through the aperture, showing that the room they had just left was in flames.

Fenton dragged Louis along until they came to the window from whose sill projected the ladder, which made a passageway to the roof of the house beyond.

"Can you walk across?"

"No," answered Louis.

"Then you must crawl. There is no other way."

Louis got down on his hands and knees, and slowly crawled across the space to the roof.

He dare not think of it, for full sixty feet below was the hard, granite pavement.

Fenton was too unnerved to walk a second time, so he, too, crawled.

Scarcely had he stood upright, when he turned and saw the face at the window, and at the same time heard a cry for help.

"Stay there, miss, and I'll save you."

Once more he crossed the ladder, and succeeded in rescuing the girl who had twice appealed for help.

The first time she thought he had fallen from the roof, and, maddened by the thought that it was through trying to rescue her, she rushed through the burning building, trying to find some way of escape, but finding none, had returned to her own room.

As Fenton helped her down the stairs from the roof, he caught sight of the front of the white night-robe she wore.

On the bosom was the impress of a red hand.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"I don't know. I had not seen it. Perhaps my hands were bleeding. But no; it is larger than mine. Oh, tell me, what does it mean?"

"My dear lady, there are people who would give thousands of dollars to find out. It is terrible! Misfortune follows those who are so marked. Excuse me, I do not want to frighten you. Cover it up—cover it up!"

Whatever its significance, there was no doubt Jim Fenton was honestly frightened at the strange sign of the Red Hand.

Louis reached the street safely, and as he did so, an awful crash told that the roof and inner walls of the hotel had fallen in, and the fine building was but a wretched ruin.

CHAPTER III.

DELIRIUM.

Louis looked around at the crowd, but did not see any one, he was so completely dazed.

He staggered, reeled and fell, just as the people recognized him and cheered his heroism.

A hundred volunteers offered to take charge of him, but the police pushed all back, and awaited the verdict of the doctors.

"He has fainted," one doctor remarked.

"He ought to be taken to a nearby house," was the verdict of another.

Several who resided in the street offered the hospitality of their homes, for every one recognized how true a hero he was, and some of his glory and fame might be reflected on them.

The question was solved by the proprietor of the burned hotel.

"He is my guest. Take him to the Ruthven House. I will be responsible."

A cheer greeted the landlord's words, for the Ruthven was one of the most superb hotels in the Empire City, and the order to take Louis there meant he was to be treated as a hero should be.

Poor lad, he was unconscious of all the honor bestowed upon him.

He did not hear the cheers; he saw not the glad, joyous faces of the many who looked on him and admired his courage.

Tenderly he was carried to the Ruthven, and placed in a large and comfortable room.

As his senses gradually returned, he realized that he was being undressed.

He could not offer any resistance if he had been so inclined, so submitted passively.

Those who were interested with the work found a small medallion, which, suspended from a piece of narrow ribbon, was worn over his heart.

The face was beautiful; it was the face of an angel, whose shadowy wings cast a subdued shadow over the countenance, making it more beautiful through its veil of shadow.

It was a painter's ideal.

Louis was placed in a bathtub, and all the soot, and grime, and smoke removed.

He was like one in a semi-trance all the time, conscious of what was being done, but unable to assist or oppose.

Then the doctor examined him carefully, as he lay upon the bed.

"No apparent injuries," he murmured, "but— Ah! that is it. Hunger is the cause of this coma."

Hunger!

To the majority it has but a dim meaning, but to the few who really are starving it means the most horrible torture.

Some bouillon was obtained, and a few teaspoonfuls poured down his throat.

The color in his face deepened, and when the second dose was given, he began to breathe naturally.

With tender thoughtfulness, the medallion was placed around his neck, and, with his hand upon it, he sank into a sound slumber.

Morning dawned, and every one in the neighborhood was interviewed by the reporters of the evening papers, just as they had been during the night by the representatives of the morning press.

Who was this young hero?

No one knew his name, but the papers wove out pretty romances about him.

One paper not only gave him a name, but published his portrait, which, it is needless to say, was purely imaginative.

And while they wove together the threads of fiction, Louis Stanhope slept, all unconscious of the fact that he was considered a true hero.

When he awoke, he was ready for the breakfast which awaited him.

The doctors would not allow him to leave the room that day, and as the reaction made him slightly delirious, he was not permitted to see any one.

In his delirium, he lived through the fire again, and raved about the Red Hand.

The listeners thought it mere delirium and fancy, but to him it seemed a terrible reality.

Toward night his brain became more unsettled, and he enacted all the scenes he had participated in at the fire.

The attendant, who had been sent by the doctor, left the room for a few minutes.

Louis took advantage of his absence to open the window and crawl out onto the sill.

In another instant, he would have fallen and been killed, but the return of the attendant saved his life.

The cold air, the biting wind, the sharp, icy snowflakes—for the snow was still falling—did what the doctors had failed to accomplish, by causing a counter reaction, which restored him suddenly and completely to his senses.

"You saved my life!" he said.

"Yes."

"I thank you, though I am doubtful whether it was worth saving. I am alone in the world, and— But why should I tell you?"

"I am interested."

"Do you think life is worth saving?"

"Yes," answered the attendant, with earnestness; "all life is worth saving, and our lives are not only our own, but our country's."

"I like to hear you talk; it reminds me of my father. He used to quote Shakespeare a great deal, and I was fond of listening to him. He used to quote often the lines:

"'Let all the ends thou aims't at be thy country's,
Thy God's, and truth.'"

CHAPTER IV.

WELLS MONTGOMERY, THE DETECTIVE.

Clarence Burfield sat in his private parlor at the St. James Hotel, deep in thought.

He had aged since the night of the fire, although only two days had elapsed.

He had received a shock from which he felt he should never recover.

His daughter had been completely prostrated by the shock, and her maid was also being cared for by the physicians.

Pretty and fascinating Elaine Burfield had given up all hope of life when she sank exhausted on her bed in the room at the ill-fated hotel, and, had it not been for the heroism of Louis Stanhope, she would only have opened her eyes in that mysterious world whose entrance is through the gate of death.

Her maid, Frances, had been rescued by Jim Fenton, but she constantly saw that ladder stretched across a deep abyss, and over which she had to crawl.

Clarence Burfield was uneasy and restless.

He kept looking at the clock on the mantel, and then at his watch, as though comparing them.

"I wish he would come. I said three o'clock, and it only wants two minutes. I have heard he is so very punctual. Ah! come in."

There was a slight rap at the door, and at the invitation, a bell-boy entered, holding a small silver salver on which was a card.

"He wishes to see you," the boy remarked, as he pushed the salver with the card under Mr. Burfield's eyes.

"Show him up, and while he is here see to it that no one attempts to come to my room."

"All right, sir. I'll be mum."

The boy, one of the cheekiest and most impudent of the class he belonged to, but did not adorn, left the parlor, the richer by a dollar.

"I wonder what it's all about?" he soliloquized. "Think I don't know that Wells Montgomery is a detective? Is it robbery? No, I guess not. Can't be divorce. I'd give this dollar to find out, but I guess I'll have to keep the dollar and remain ignorant."

He approached the detective, and conducted him to the elevator.

"Thank you; I'll not trouble you to go up; I'll find the room. No. 9."

"It is no trouble."

"I know it is not, but—"

Montgomery stepped into the elevator, and was ascending before he had time to finish the sentence.

"Good-day, Mr. Montgomery. I sent for you—"

"Yes; you are Clarence Burfield, late of Chicago, formerly of Atlanta, and still earlier of New Orleans?"

"You astonish me—"

"Wealthy, retired sugar planter, one daughter, charming and most fascinating, traveling for pleasure and change, but called to New York at the worst time of the year."

"Mr. Montgomery, are you a mind-reader or a witch?"

"Neither. I am a detective."

"But how do you know my history so well?"

"Because I am a detective. You sent for me, therefore I turn to the letter 'B' in my private ledger, and see that Burfield, Clarence, age—never mind the age—is known to the police——"

"Known to the police! What do you mean, sir?"

"By the police, I mean myself."

"But how am I known to you?"

"Nothing simpler to answer. My method is, perhaps, unique; I do not claim it to be original. It is simply: I see a name in the papers; it may be at a public dinner, or as a subscriber to a charity. I enter it in my private ledger. It is almost a certainty that the name occurs again; I note down the second event, and so on until I know quite a good deal about the person. Now, in your case——"

"Yes, in my case, what have you got about me?"

"You sold your sugar plantation to a Frenchman named Jacques Bonard——"

"Correct."

"There was a quarrel, a challenge, a duel, what about I do not know, but you killed your opponent. It was fair, and according to the code."

"That was a long time ago."

"Yes, twenty-one years ago, or so; you were not married then. You bought another plantation, and there you married, and the charming girl was born——"

"You seem to know everything."

"No."

"What do you lack?"

"I will tell you. You stayed with a friend in Atlanta. The first night you were there the house was forcibly entered; the second night the house was burned down——"

"Well?"

"That is all I know about Atlanta, but at Chicago you were stabbed as you were entering your hotel—the Palmer House—late at night. Fortunately, some hard substance prevented the dagger from entering your heart, and only a mere scratch was inflicted. You arrived in New York, took a suite of rooms at the —— Hotel, and the second night you are there the hotel is burned to the ground. These are all strange happenings in one man's life. Now, have I proved to you that my ledger is reliable?"

"You have, and it saves me very considerable time, for I should have had to tell you all you have recounted; therefore, so much time is gained. I can rely on your secrecy?"

"Mr. Burfield, a detective is like a priest and a doctor—all communications are sacred."

"Then I will intrust you with my entire life, and if you can solve the mystery which seems to attach itself to me, and can avert the calamity I fear, I shall be pleased to reward you far beyond your expectations, for I am really a rich man."

"I am all attention."

"Have you, in your account of my life, any reference to a mysterious sign or warning?"

"No."

"Then you do not know about the Red Hand?"

"The Red Hand? Do you mean that you are to be a victim of that mysterious band of miscreants known as the League of the Red Hand?"

"I know nothing about any league; I can only tell you that, whenever my life has been endangered, the impress of a blood-red hand has been found in my room, or somewhere where I should be sure to see it."

"Ah! Then it was not raving?"

"What?"

"The boy who saved your daughter——"

"What of him? Where is he? I want to reward him. I have tried to find him."

"Poor boy! he was starving. After the fire he was delirious. He was always raving about the Red Hand. It was looked upon as mere delirium."

"His name?"

"Louis Stanhope, he calls himself."

"I will find him, and he shall never regret saving my Elaine's life."

"But it was not to find him that you sent for me?"

"No. You say there is a band of men called the League of the Red Hand?"

"Yes; and though rewards have been offered, and the ablest detectives employed, not one of the members, as far as we know, has been brought to justice."

"Have you been engaged?"

"No. If I had——"

"You would have succeeded?"

"Yes—I feel sure of it."

"Then accept a retainer from me, and hunt down the members with mercilessness. They wage a terrible vendetta——"

"A vendetta? Tell me your story, and then—to unravel the mystery of the Red Hand shall be my life work!"

CHAPTER V.

AT THE FIRE STATION.

Louis Stanhope was uneasy in his mind.

When the first pangs of hunger had been satisfied, his head ceased to ache, and he fell asleep.

But no sooner did Morpheus claim his senses than he began to dream, and in those strange visions, which have never yet been explained, he saw constantly before him a blood-red hand.

When he awoke, he found an attendant ready to administer more liquid food, and at the same time a nerve tonic.

Again he slept, and the same experience, with different details, was re-enacted.

"A red hand!" he thought, when he awoke. "What can it mean? What is its significance?"

Then his mind recurred to the scene at the fire.

He went through every detail of his heroic act, and remembered how fairly bewildered he was at the beauty of the girl whose life he had saved.

Who was she?

He had not asked, neither did he inquire afterward at the hotel. Louis would have acted in just the same way to save the poorest help in the hotel, and he took no special credit to himself for his action.

But he did feel an interest in the girl, for her face was winsome and bright, and though he had not seen her eyes, he felt sure they were brighter than diamonds and as lovely as the rest of her face.

He was greatly worried over the red hand on the door, more especially as the fireman had evinced a nervous dread when it had been mentioned.

That there was something uncanny and ominous in it he was sure, and that it, in some way, affected the girl he had saved seemed equally certain.

The desire to know its meaning so overwhelmed him that, as soon as he felt strong enough to get up, he watched an opportunity to escape the vigilance of his attendants and leave the hotel.

He fully intended returning, because he hoped to be able to thank the hotelkeeper, and ask him if he could find him work.

He timed his escape so well that he passed downstairs and through the office unnoticed.

He wanted to find Jim Fenton, but did not know to which company he belonged.

Knowing his name, and that he was a fireman, was, however, he thought, sufficient.

He asked a policeman which was the nearest fire station, and to it he went.

"Jim Fenton, did you say?"

"Yes; is he not here?"

"Don't know him."

"Where is it likely I can find him?"

"A fireman, is he?"

"Yes."

"To what house does he belong?"

"I don't know."

"You know him?"

"I—that is—I want to see him; he was at the hotel fire."

"Oh! Tom, come here. I tumble now."

Then, putting his hand on the boy's shoulder, he half dragged him into the engine house.

The great, snorting engine, with steam up, ready to leap forth as soon as the alarm gong sounded, stood there as bright as sunshine.

How affectionate the men looked at it!

A speck of dust on its bright, polished surface would have been considered a desecration.

Through a circular opening in the ceiling of the engine-room a man was seen dressing himself.

As his name was called, he threw his suspenders over his shoulder, and, gripping them between his teeth, slid down the pole to the floor beneath.

The work of fastening his suspenders was engaged in while he talked.

"So I was called away from a nice sleep for nothing, eh?"

"Call this nothing, Tom? Don't you know who this is?"

"Can't say I do."

"Never saw him before, eh?"

"No."

"Then, Tom Fergus, you're a—prevaricator. Don't you remember the boy what did the trapeze act at the fire?"

"Why, bless my soul and body! you don't say so!"

Tom clasped Louis by the hand, squeezing him until the boy thought every bone would be broken.

"Welcome to our engine house! Say, Jack, if you hadn't called me, I'd have smashed your—let me give you another shake, my boy."

Tom was so enthusiastic that Louis was almost afraid to give him his hand again.

A man came up from the basement, and instantly Tom caught him.

"Take off your hat, Bill, take off your hat. This is the fire hero."

"Not the boy what—"

"Climbed the telegraph pole—"

"And walked along the wires—"

"And swung himself from a rope into the window—"

"And rescued the prettiest gal I ever seen."

"Say saw, Bill, not seen. It gives you away so."

The fireman had been so eager to tell of Louis' heroism that before one could finish a sentence another had taken it up and

started to conclude it, only to find a companion adding to its completeness.

"Say, Bill, suppose we adopt him?"

"Proposed, and seconded, and carried unanimously, that the hero of the hotel fire is adopted by Engine Company No.——"

Tom was interrupted by another member of the house, who suggested that Louis had not been asked to accept the honor.

"What'll you have to drink?" asked Bill.

"Nothing, thank you."

"Bosh! Have something, if it's only a drink of Jack's coffee. Jack makes the best coffee in the city."

"I don't mind coffee, though, really, I do not want anything. I came——"

"Glad you did. My boy, there ought to be a statute erected in your honor."

Bill always got mixed in his use of English words, and, of course, meant statue, and not a statute.

"I did nothing——" Louis commenced.

"Then, blow me if I wouldn't like to see you do something. What do you say to being a fireman?"

"I think I should like it. But I want to find Mr. Fenton."

"Not Jim Fenton?"

"Yes."

"Bless your heart, he was here last night, and I guess he may be here again to-night."

"I wish I could see him."

"Why can't you? If you trot around to Engine House No. 9, I guess he'll look at you with his big eyes, and you can look at him as well."

"Where is Engine No. 9?"

"I'd like to go with you, and kind o' introduce you, but I can't leave; but I'll tell you the way."

Louis was eager to go, and his new friends made him promise to pay them another visit, and expressed a hope that he would some day be a member of their engine house.

CHAPTER VI.

LOUIS FINDS A FRIEND.

Jim Fenton recognized Louis as soon as he entered the engine house.

"Glad to see you. Lucky you were not an hour later, for I should have been away. Come home with me. It is my day off."

Jim took his young friend through a labyrinth of streets, at last stopping before a modern monstrosity known as a flat house.

Narrow rooms, long passageways, dark and unhealthy, but such as modern land owners build for tenants having moderate incomes.

Up two flights of narrow stairs they picked their way through the darkness.

At last, a door was opened, and Jim gave his young friend a cordial welcome.

Louis found himself in a cozy parlor, though so narrow that it seemed almost impossible to get full-sized furniture into it.

"Madeline, where are you?"

A young woman, clean and healthy-looking, came into the parlor.

"Madeline, this is the young hero I told you about."

Then, remembering he had only half done his duty, he introduced the lady as his sister.

"Is dinner ready?"

"Yes, Jim."

"Then come along, Louis; you will honor us, won't you?"

Madeline Fenton led the way through three rooms, which were

so dark that Louis could scarcely tell what they were, and then into a comfortable little dining-room, which had the advantage of a window opening to the pure air, instead of the vitiated atmosphere of an airshaft.

Madeline was a good housekeeper, and kept her brother's flat in excellent order.

The dinner was plain but wholesome, and Madeline took care that nothing to disturb the harmony should be discussed.

While she was clearing away the dinner, Jim and Louis sat in the little parlor, and the boy startled his host by asking, abruptly:

"What was the meaning of that red hand at the fire?"

"I wish you had forgotten all about it, Louis; but as you haven't, I will tell you all I know. The Red Hand means death." "Death?"

"Yes. There are many things about the League of the Red Hand which are a mystery to me, but I know enough to make me shiver when I hear the name of the league, or see a red hand."

"Won't you tell me about it?"

"Well, yes; it may do you good. When I was a boy, I lived away down South. My father had been a planter before the war. He lost all during that struggle, and because he had remained loyal to the Union, when the war was over he was hated and shunned by all Southerners. He tried hard to live comfortably for his children's sake, but it was a hard struggle. When I was about five years old, our family moved farther North, into what might be called a border State. It was there I was educated and got my first glimpse of the world.

"I was fond of reading detective stories."

"So am I," Louis interjected.

"And so are most boys, only I found out very early that the sleuths of fiction were very unlike the detectives in real life."

"In what way?"

"Every way; but let me tell my story, or Madeline will be in, and then our talk will be stopped, for I would not like her to hear about the Red Hand."

Louis was glad it was daylight, for there seemed something so uncanny about the very mention of the Red Hand that he shuddered, even light as it was.

In the dark, he would have been positively frightened.

"As I was saying, I liked stories about detectives, and I read one telling of some wonderful secret society which baffled all the skill of the sleuths, until a man known as the Shadow found out all about the society, learned that it had praiseworthy objects, and joined it himself.

"Then I began to glory in secret societies, and thought how nice it would be to have some grip, or sign, or password, by which I could detect fellow-members, wherever I might meet them.

"It was a pleasing thought. I organized a society of boys. We swore each other to absolute secrecy. We had our signs and mysterious language. We even had a cipher code, in which we corresponded.

"We played all sorts of practical jokes, and were never found out.

"Soon we grew mischievous, and, I am sorry to say, did things for which we ought to have been punished.

"Don't ever join a secret society, Louis, unless it is purely for social and beneficial objects.

"One day one of our members was guilty of a very outrageous act, and was found out. To save himself, as he thought, he told all about our society, and gave the names of the members."

"The wretch!" Louis ejaculated.

Madeline entered the parlor, and the conversation turned into quite another channel.

She was a bright, sparkling girl, not more than eighteen, who could play nicely, but not brilliantly, could sing and make herself very agreeable.

Louis, who had been bereft of female society, was charmed, and thought Jim Fenton the most fortunate man on earth.

When household duties again called her away, Jim continued his story.

"When I was about eighteen, I heard of a secret society whose object was the amelioration of society. I heard a great deal about it, and my old love for secret societies revived. I applied for admission."

"How jolly! Did they accept you?"

"Yes, and I was cured. I never want to belong to such a society again."

"Why?"

"The night came for my initiation. I was left in an anteroom while the preliminaries were gone through.

"I was asked if I would swear to secrecy. A skull was placed in my hand as I took the oath never to divulge the ritual or the oath.

"When the investigating committee reported that I had taken the oath, I was led, blindfolded, into the large room.

"I felt—for I could not see—that the gas was lowered, so that the room was nearly dark.

"Some words were uttered, which I had sworn not to reveal, so must not repeat, and then the bandage was removed from my eyes.

"I saw in front of me a large red hand, illuminated so that it showed brightly in the darkness.

"At the other end of the room was another red hand, and on the altar, or pillar, close to where I stood, there was a grinning skull, with flames of fire proceeding from its eyeless sockets and mouth.

"I was startled. Not a word was spoken, and those hideous red hands and the fiery skull made the silence awful.

"Gradually the light was turned on, and I saw thirteen figures, completely robed in black, having masks over their faces, and long, loose robes of black material reaching to their feet.

"Are you ready for the ordeal?" asked one of the men, and I answered in the affirmative.

"A coffin was brought in, and I was seized and put into it, the lid being fastened down.

"Swear never to betray your fellow-members," was uttered over the coffin, and when I agreed to the new oath, the lid was lifted off, and I got out.

"The scene had changed. The black robes were thrown aside and white ones took their places.

"On the breast of each was a blood-red hand, the insignia of the society.

"There was a lot more said and done which I am not at liberty to tell you.

"When the masks were removed, and the robes thrown off, I recognized some of my most intimate friends.

"A supper followed, for which I paid; that was the rule of the society. We sang songs, told stories and recited until early morning, and then, though feeling tired and weary, we had to go to the work of the day."

"But what was there horrible about all that?" Louis asked.

"Nothing. For months I attended the meetings. Never did I hear anything wrong discussed, but I soon learned that there were goings on about which I knew nothing.

"At times one of our members would disappear——"

"You do not mean he was killed?"

"I don't know; we never heard of him afterward."

"Did you never ask?"

"What would have been the use? I might have been the next. Several times I heard of people being found dead, and near them the mark of the Red Hand. Houses would be burned down, and some one would remember that, just before the burning, there would be the mysterious Red Hand displayed. People got frightened. Rewards were offered for information concerning the Red Hand.

"Governors of States issued proclamations against the league, but it flourished and became a still greater terror."

"Are you a member now?"

"Yes and no."

"How can you be both?"

"Once a member, only death can release you, but I ran away. I came to New York. I entered the fire department, and have heard nothing about the League of the Red Hand until the hotel fire, and then——"

Jim Fenton shuddered as he remembered the events of that night.

"You saw it?"

"Yes; it was on her gown. Some member of the league is in New York, and has an enmity to her. I wonder who she is?"

"I saw the Red Hand on the door of the room of the girl I threw out of the window."

"Both will die. It was no use our saving them."

"Can't we prevent it?"

"What?"

"Can't we find out who those girls were, and put them on their guard?"

"No use. The League of the Red Hand is merciless. Wherever the sign appears, it means death."

"I am not a member."

"I hope you never will be."

"I never shall; but I am going to find out who are members, and I will see if I cannot prevent them committing any more crimes."

"Where are you living?"

"Nowhere. I have no home. I stayed at the Ruthven House, but only because I fainted after the fire."

Jim Fenton whistled, at first like a bird, then gradually his whistle took the form of a popular song of the day.

It was, perhaps, unusual, and not very courteous, but was a way he had when he was thinking.

When he stopped, he looked earnestly at Louis for a full minute before he commenced a catechism something like this:

"What is your name?"

"Louis Stanhope."

"Age?"

"Just turned fifteen."

"No home?"

"No."

"Father and mother both dead?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

"Do not know."

"Do you want work?"

"Yes."

Jim Fenton whistled again, but his warbling did not last as long as before.

Perhaps the entrance of Madeline shortened the music.

"Madeline?"

"Yes, Jim."

"What do you think of Louis Stanhope?"

It was a leading question, and Madeline did not know how to answer it. So her brother continued:

"Louis is going to board with us for a time, perhaps altogether. You and Aunt Cortwright won't be so lonely nights when I am away. He can have the room next the dining-room; that is, if you would like to have him as a boarder."

"I should very much."

"That is settled, then. Louis will come at once. His trunk can be sent for later."

"I have no trunk. I——"

"Yes, I understand; it is to come later. I'll arrange all that."

And before Louis could interpose one word, it was all arranged that he was to board with the Fentons, no questions being raised as to whether Mrs. Cortwright, the aunt of the Fentons, would consent.

"Come along, Louis; I have one or two places to call, and if you want to stretch your legs, it will be just the thing."

Jim led the way into a street devoted to retail stores, and stopped suddenly before a large tailoring establishment.

"Louis, that suit looks as though it would fit you?"

"Yes."

"I'll go in and ask the price."

"What for? I have no money, Mr. Fenton."

"Don't call me mister; say Jim. And as to money—well, I'll lend it. You'll never get a situation in those old smoked and burned clothes, so come along."

They entered the store, where it was evident that Jim was known, and that favorably.

Two assistants stepped forward to learn his wants.

In a loud voice, Jim said he wanted a good knockabout suit for his friend, the boy hero of the great hotel fire.

The proprietor came out of his private office, and was introduced to Louis.

The diplomacy of Fenton secured a good suit of clothes at half price, while the proprietor insisted on giving the young hero a good overcoat.

When they had left the tailor's, Jim went next door to an out-fitter's, and secured two suits of underclothing, flannel outer shirts and socks.

"Now, Louis, when we send for that trunk to-morrow, we shall have some use for it."

"You are too good, Mr.—I mean Jim."

"Good? Not a bit of it. You've done me a power of good; and, besides, are we not going to be a league of two to fight the League of the Red Hand?"

"I must go to the Ruthven House."

"That is just where we are going. You look all the better for a change of clothes; we will thank all parties, leave our address, and then go home to a good cup of tea. Madeline makes good tea, but you must tell me what you think of aunt's coffee?"

So they chatted on until the Ruthven House was reached.

"There's been a caller for you. He left his card, and hoped that he would soon see you," was the clerk's greeting, when Louis entered the office.

He looked at the card, and read the name engraved in fine script:

"MR. CLARENCE BURFIELD,"

and penciled in the corner:

"St. James Hotel, New York."

"Too late to-day, Louis; we must call—at least, you must—to-morrow. Wonder who Clarence Burfield is? Perhaps a reporter, wanting to interview you for the morning paper. What a thing is to be famous!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVE'S OFFICE.

Up three flights of stairs—dirty stairs they were, too—in a downtown office building, standing in a street whose better days had been in the past, we catch sight of an office door, bearing upon a black tin plate the name in white letters:

"WELLS MONTGOMERY."

Opening the door, we find a room as untidy as it was possible for a room to be.

It was a veritable curiosity shop.

On the walls were portraits of all sizes and styles—portraits of the most famous and infamous dodgers and violators of the laws to be found in the world, from the gentlemanly bank cashier to the sandbagger and highway robber.

There was a glass-fronted bookcase on one side of the room, but instead of books, the shelves were filled with a strange assortment of things—pistols, knives, knuckle-dusters, slungshots, old hats, belts, shoes, and, in fact, such a variety of things that space forbids any attempt at cataloguing.

Yet everything had a history. Every article recalled some story which redounded to the credit of Wells Montgomery, the detective.

Papers and books were thrown on the floor indiscriminately.

It would be difficult to find a place more crowded, more untidy or dirtier than the office of the great sleuth.

Uptown, in one of the most fashionable flats, on one of the most exclusive streets, we should find luxury, ease and elegance.

Costly carpets on the floors, bric-a-brac worth thousands of dollars in cabinets and on mantel shelves, pictures most valuable on the walls, and, in fact, order, tidiness, luxuriousness and wealth manifested everywhere.

And in these two extremes dwelt Wells Montgomery.

After the detective left the presence of Clarence Burfield, he jumped on a downtown car and went to his office, which we have feebly described.

He took off his coat and put on a long wrapper, designated a bath robe, which completely covered his person.

He turned on the gas and lighted a portable gas heater, the only way he had of warming the room.

Then he took two briar-root pipes and a meerschaum, and filled all three with an exceedingly mild tobacco.

These he placed on his open desk. When these preparations were complete, he sat down, lighted the tobacco in the meerschaum, put his feet on his desk, and began to puff at his pipe and think at the same time.

Wells Montgomery was an original; in fact, most people called him eccentric and a crank.

If we could see into the inner recesses of his thought factory, which is usually called the mind, we should find his thoughts running disjointedly, it is true, but bearing entirely on the League of the Red Hand.

"Clarence Burfield! Not a bad name! A story would sell with such a title if it had, as a second one, 'The League of the Red Hand.' Shall I write it?"

Before Wells Montgomery had got as far as that in his thoughts, the room was so full of tobacco smoke that it was impossible to see across it. He was a great smoker, regardless of the delicacy of flavor only to be obtained from gentle inhalation of the fumes of tobacco.

A little mouse, perhaps the only living thing that ever entered that office who dared to take liberties with anything belonging to the detective, crawled quietly to the top of the desk,

and seating himself on a volume of criminal records, looked at the great sleuth almost defiantly.

Montgomery looked up, and saw the little animal.

He laughed at its courage, and the mouse scampered behind some books.

The detective paused, in his thoughts about the Red Hand, to repeat the lines written by the Scot poet, Burns:

"Wee, sleekit, cowrin', tim'rous beastie,
Oh, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bick'ring brattle!
I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken nature's social union,
And justifies that ill opinion,
Which mak's thee startle
At me, thy poor earth-born companion,
And fellow-mortal!"

Perhaps the poet's sentiment reassured the mouse, for it again showed itself, and the detective went on with his smoking and thinking, regardless of the "wee, sma' beastie."

"Can I write such a book? Not at present. The League of the Red Hand is a mystery to me. Can I solve the mystery? It would be worth, let me see, how much? Burfield will give ten thousand, perhaps more, and rewards offered run up to twenty thousand more. Private individuals, who are, or have been, threatened, another twenty thousand. Yes, I could make fifty thousand, at the very least."

The tobacco in the meerschaum was burned out, and Montgomery laid it aside, took up a briar-root pipe, lighted the contents, and puffed away with scarcely any intermission.

"There is a risk. Tom Norton went all the way to Louisiana to expose the league and land the members in jail. He was on the point of success, when he accidentally fell into the Mississippi and was drowned. The funny part about it was that the coroner's jury found that he had cut his hand in some way, because on his coat was the imprint of a human hand, evidently outlined with blood. There were no cuts on his hand, but such was the decision of the jury.

"Then there was Jack Westerly; he actually declared he knew the names of three of the principal officers; but before he could obtain a warrant for their arrest he was stabbed, and died from the wound, the secret with him.

"So it is dangerous, isn't it, mouseie?"

The mouse ran away, not because of the question, but startled by a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

The door opened, and Rowley Barnes, the fireman, entered.

"Well?"

The fireman looked around the room, as well as the smoke would allow, and trembled.

"Well, Mr. Rowley Barnes, what can I do for you?"

"Are we alone?"

"Yes."

"May I speak freely?"

"You may, only I bid you remember that my time is precious. A minute is worth a dollar, so take care."

"I shall not keep you long. I have a companion, a fireman, and he has at times acted queerly. I sometimes think——"

"Write it down and mail your statement; I really have not time to listen to you. Good-day."

Barnes would not leave. Instead of doing so, he leaned forward and almost whispered:

"I thought you might be interested in the Mystery of the Red Hand."

Wells Montgomery pushed an office stool across the room, and brusquely bade Rowley Barnes sit down.

"Do you smoke?"

"Yes."

"Got a pipe?"

"Yes."

"Then here is some good tobacco; smoke while you talk."

"Then you are interested?"

"A little."

"The Red Hand was seen at the hotel fire."

"I know it."

"Three times it was seen."

"I am aware of it."

"But you don't know who put it there?"

"Do you?"

"Perhaps."

"Tell me what you think."

"Indeed! Are you not aware that there are some pretty big rewards to be given to those who discover the dreaded Red Hand miscreants?"

"You wish half the reward?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what you know."

"Not till I have your assurance of a fair divide."

"Really, Mr. Rowley Barnes, you have placed yourself in the power of the law, and I have a great mind to have you arrested as an accomplice of the Red Hand Leaguers."

"Do not be too sure, Mr. Wells Montgomery, of your powers. I have not been in the pay of the secret service for so long without learning a few things."

Montgomery arose from his seat, opened the door, and, with the manners of a courtier, wished Rowley Barnes good-day.

"I wonder what he knows?" was the form of thought which passed through the detective's mind as he resumed his seat at the desk.

"Half the rewards! No; that is too much. I might give him a thousand dollars. But suppose he goes to some one else? What if he goes to police headquarters! I might lose all. No, I think not. Anyway, I'll take the risk."

By the time the third pipe had been smoked, Montgomery was ready to go to the luxury of his residence, a place in which he was no longer the detective, but the private citizen.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RUNAWAY.

Elaine Burfield was a girl worth saying.

Not only was she beautiful, but her heart was in the right place, and made her character as lovely as her person.

She was a healthy girl, and delighted in outdoor sports, and was especially happy when riding or driving.

Her father humored her in everything, but often trembled as he thought of her fearlessness when behind or on a horse.

After the shock of the fire, she became restless, and felt that she could not breathe in the hotel.

She recovered from the shock far quicker than the doctor thought right or proper, and when he called, on the day following that of the interview between her father and Wells Montgomery, he was very properly alarmed at the impropriety of her rapid recovery, for he was told she had gone out for a drive.

Elaine had been taken, by her father, on the day of her arrival in the Empire City, to one of the most fashionable livery stables and riding schools, close to Central Park, and the proprietor was

told to supply her with anything in the equine way which she desired and he could guarantee.

On the day of the fire she had taken out the fastest horse possessed by the liveryman, and had ridden through Central Park, with such dash and grace that she had been noted by all, and even mentioned in the morning papers.

On the day when she so shocked the doctor she had gone to the stable and asked for a pair of ponies she had seen on her last visit. They were out, and, in fact, the only team available was one far too fresh for a lady to drive.

But Elaine had her own way, and with some misgiving, the liveryman saw her drive away.

He had insisted on a man attending her, and so an experienced horseman was mounted on the dickey of the phaeton.

The animals behaved splendidly.

They felt that, although the lines were held by a woman, she was their master.

On they sped, passing most horses, but yet keeping within the pace allowed by law for the park.

Every one admired Elaine, and a score of young men wished they knew her.

The swift cutting through the pure air, the pleasure of driving, exhilarated her, and she felt tempted to allow the horses to exceed the pace.

Some one had been thrown ahead of her.

There was a commotion. People screamed and ran, horsemen quickened their pace, and every one became excited.

A mounted policeman galloped toward the scene of the accident.

He passed Elaine, and her horses chafed at being held back.

They wanted to overtake the policeman.

She held them well in hand, and the excitement sent the healthy color to her cheeks.

Another policeman rode by, faster than the first.

The horses tossed their heads.

They snorted and fretted at the thought of being held back. Elaine let the lines slacken just a little. Advantage was taken of it.

The horses dashed on with fiery speed.

In vain Elaine pulled the lines.

Her veins were standing out on her face, full with arterial blood.

Her muscles were strong, but they were strained to their utmost.

She had lost control, and knew the horses were running away. She had scorned asking a man's aid, but now she was glad there was a man in the dickey.

She called out to him:

"Help me!"

He leaned forward to grasp the lines.

The off wheel of the phaeton struck a tree root on the roadside. The man was thrown into the road, and Elaine was alone.

Faster and faster flew the horses.

Men and women, trees and shrubs, were passed with lightning-like speed.

Men shouted, women screamed, all ran after the infuriated animals, thus increasing their fright and making them tear ahead without reason or thought of danger.

Their eyes were like balls of fire, from their nostrils the wind was exhaled until it looked like steam.

Faster and faster they flew.

Elaine was losing strength.

She knew her life was once more in danger.

Nothing, save a miracle, could save her.

The horses had rounded the curve and were on the homeward road.

The danger was increasing, because the nearer home, the greater number of vehicles to be passed.

She held the lines mechanically; all power to guide the horses was gone.

At that moment, Louis Stanhope, who had been sitting watching the people pass and repass, saw the horses, and knew they were running away.

They leaped forward in the road.

They were close upon him.

With a sudden spring, he grasped the bridle of the nearest horse, only to be lifted off his feet and borne forward by the mad-dened and frightened animal.

*But he held on, while the people shouted, and screamed, and begged him to let go.

To do so was almost certain death; to hold fast was equally dangerous.

Elaine revived somewhat, and pulled the lines tighter, as she leaned back to give her additional strength.

The horses turned from the road.

They were on the grass.

Right in front of them was the lake.

Another minute, and horses and carriage would be in the water.

But in that minute Louis managed to grasp the other bridle, and the act caused the horses to check their speed a little.

Right on the brink of the lake he swung himself free from the off horse, and the weight falling on the other's mouth, made the horses swing around and skirt the lake, instead of dashing into it.

CHAPTER IX.

"NO ANGEL COULD BE FAIRER."

A great point was gained when the horses skirted the lake, instead of dashing into it.

Louis pulled at the bridle, and as his feet touched the ground he was able to check the speed of the animals somewhat.

Elaine regained her presence of mind, and gave a sudden tug at the lines.

This was unexpected by the horses, which had ceased to look for any opposition to their will from that source.

They stopped as suddenly as they had started.

A crowd quickly gathered.

"You saved her life, my boy!" an old gentleman exclaimed. "You are a true hero!"

Louis did not hear. The exertion had been too much for him, and he was so dazed that he had no knowledge of anything which transpired.

"Are you hurt?"

"No," answered Elaine, "not hurt, only frightened."

"It must have unnerved you," added another.

Elaine was the one who attracted all the attention.

It is ever so. Let a young and pretty girl be the heroine of an adventure, and she is the one to receive exclusive attention, though others may have been equally entitled to a share.

"Will you please see if that young hero is hurt?" she asked the people who were pressing around her.

"He is all right. A boy never takes any hurt."

"Please do not speak like that. He saved my life."

By this time Louis had, to a great extent, recovered himself, and was about to leave the spot, when Elaine called him.

He fancied her face was familiar, but could not recall where he had seen it.

"I know not how to thank you—" she commenced.

"Do not thank me, miss; I only did what any one else would have done. I hope you are not hurt?"

"No, thank you, I am not hurt in the least. I was frightened. Are you hurt?"

"No, miss."

"Do you think you could help me drive home?"

"Oh, yes, miss, I can drive; I used—when I was a boy——"

Elaine could not help smiling, and Louis joined her.

"I mean when I was quite little; when I was twelve years old; I am fifteen now—then I used to drive."

"Then will you sit by me? I will drive, but I shall feel safer if you are by my side."

The horses had become quiet. Their long run had exhausted them somewhat, and perhaps they were ashamed of themselves.

Horses are capable of such a feeling. Those who have owned horses know that they are susceptible to praise and blame, and will sulk or show pleasure as circumstances move them.

The writer has a horse which, when it has done anything wrong, will hang its head and show how thoroughly it is ashamed. Louis sat at Elaine's left, and she handled the lines with all the skill of an accomplished whip.

When the crowd had been passed, Elaine, with that sweetness which was so natural to her, said how much she appreciated the heroism he had displayed.

"Do you know," she added, "that twice this week my life has been saved."

"Twice?"

"Yes; I was in that terrible hotel fire, and, oh! it was horrible! I thought I should be burned to death. The room filled with smoke. I tried to leave it, but some one had opened the door, and, I suppose, not seeing me, had pulled it to, and I could not open it. Then I thought I was suffocating. I could not cry out; I grew dizzy, and I was sure I was about to die. I remember throwing myself on the bed, and then knew nothing—steady, my beauties; don't run away again—until I opened my eyes and saw my father looking into my face—steady, now; it's only a piece of newspaper; I won't let anything hurt you. Is it not strange how frightened horses are of the unusual?"

Elaine had rattled on, talking about the fire and addressing the horses, giving Louis no opportunity to say a word.

How proud he was to sit beside her!

How glad that he had been of use to her a second time!

She paused, almost breathless, and directed all her attention to her horses.

Then Louis asked:

"How were you saved?"

"It was wonderful! Papa says that nothing like it has ever been heard of before. I was saved by a boy—I suppose I should say a young gentleman—about your age. I do think boys are nice, don't you?"

"I prefer girls," answered Louis.

"Of course; how silly of me! But I do wish I were a boy, so that I could do something. A girl seems so useless; don't you think so?"

"No, miss. If it were not for girls—ladies, I should say—half the pleasure of life would be lost. They are the world's sunshine."

"How very gallant! Where could you have learned such fine speeches?"

"I think a great deal. But this boy, what was his name?"

"I don't know; I don't think papa was able to find out."

"Should you know him again?"

"Dear me, no. I did not see him, and papa says he has no idea what he was like, except that——"

"Yes?"

"That he seemed quite poor."

"He was poor."

"You know him?"

"I mean he must have been poor, from what I heard. But, miss, we are close to the stables; may I leave you here?"

"No, indeed! I want you to escort me to the hotel. I want papa to thank you——"

"No, no, no; I don't wish thanks. I am too happy in having been able to serve you."

"But I will take no excuse; I insist—I—— Ah, here is the man who went with me in the dickey. Were you hurt, Tim?"

"No, Miss Burfield, only shaken. I ran after you, but them there horses seemed to have the very devil—asking your pardon—in them, and you were out of sight before I knew which way to go."

"It is all right now. Take the horses, and look after them well. It was not their fault."

She stepped out of the phaeton, and was about walking away, when she changed her mind, and ordered a coach.

Louis held the door for her, and was about to wish her good-day, but she caught his hand.

"Step in. Coachman, drive to the St. James."

Louis felt his cheeks burning as he sat beside the beautiful girl.

"Where do you live?" she asked.

He told her, and then she wanted to know whether he went to school, or had graduated.

"I am a poor boy, miss——"

"Burfield, my name is; what is yours?"

"Louis Stanhope."

"What a nice name! I like Louis, and when joined to such a patronymic as Stanhope, it sounds artistic and musical."

"My father was an artist."

"Is he——"

"Yes, both my mother and father have left me. My mother has not been long dead. It is hard to be left alone in the world."

"I know it is. I am motherless, but my papa makes up as well as he can for my loss."

The coach stopped, and Louis, with courtier-like grace, stepped out and assisted Elaine to alight.

He felt a greater interest in her than ever, for he knew how she was threatened by the League of the Red Hand, unless the appearance of the symbol was but a coincidence.

"Papa, this young gentleman has saved my life. I—— But let me introduce him. Mr. Louis Stanhope——"

"You do not say so? Why, bless my heart, I would rather see you, my boy, than all the kings of Europe."

"How did you know, papa? I did not think——"

"Did you not? Why, Elaine, didn't you know before to-day that this is the great hero of the fire?"

"Oh, papa! And to think he saved my life again to-day!" said Elaine.

"To-day! What do you mean?"

She told him of the runaway, and of the heroism displayed by Louis Stanhope, who stood in the private parlor, blushing, as he heard praises fall from the sweetest lips he had even seen.

Louis looked at Elaine, and he thought no angel could be fairer; he saw her beautiful form, and his whole heart went out to her, for she was his ideal; he could not imagine that there could be anything more perfect or beautiful this side of heaven.

All the time she was talking, her father held Louis by the hand, often emphasizing some remark by a vigorous shake.

"My boy, I am proud of you. I think the country ought also to be proud of you."

"I have really not done anything deserving of so much praise, believe me, Mr. Burfield. I am delighted to have been of service to you."

CHAPTER X.

"SAY NOT A WORD TO ELAINE."

"You will stay and dine with us—oh, yes, you will. I can take no excuse."

Louis knew very well that at high-class hotels it was the custom to dress for dinner, and he had but one suit, and even for that was indebted to his fireman friend, Jim Fenton.

"My dear boy, we do not study dress; we are plain people, and I really wish you to stay."

Elaine whispered to her father.

"Why, certainly; a good idea. We'll dine here, instead of going down to the dining-room. Now, Louis, you can have no excuse."

Louis would still have liked to leave, but he did not wish to offend Mr. Burfield, and he thought also he might learn in what way his new friend had incurred the displeasure of the League of the Red Hand.

"Elaine, won't you play and sing something for Louis? Or perhaps you are too tired?"

"I shall be pleased to do so, if—if—Louis would like to hear me sing."

He expressed the pleasure it would give him, and his heart was beating wildly as he spoke, for he was being lifted out of his surroundings and placed in a heaven of bliss.

Elaine sang one of those sweet songs of the South, which are so truly musical and fascinating.

Louis was in a new world.

He could not think that Clarence Burfield would ever have done anything wrong by which he had incurred the hatred of the miscreants who, under the cloak of secrecy, committed daring crimes.

Elaine left the room, and laughingly said she supposed gentlemen liked a quiet chat before as well as after dinner.

She had not been out of the room two minutes before Burfield, in a hoarse whisper, asked Louis, if he had seen anything at all mysterious at the time of the fire."

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"Am I to say?"

"I ask you, as a friend, to tell me what you saw."

"A red hand," answered Louis.

"Ah! Where?"

"On the door of Miss Burfield's room."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did any one else see it?"

"The firemen must have done so."

"Of course, of course. How strange! I wonder if some fireman hurt himself?"

"No, sir; it was a sign."

"Of what?"

Louis leaned forward until his face was very close to Burfield's.

"Don't you know, Mr. Burfield?" he asked.

"I—I—I—dear me, I hardly know what to say! What is your theory?"

"As you ask, I will tell you. I think it was the sign of a secret society."

"A secret society?"

"Yes. The League of the Red Hand. You must have heard of it."

"Have you?"

"Certainly, sir, and from what I have heard I should be very careful, for they do say that——"

"You have not said a word to Elaine?"

"No, sir."

"Good! Don't whisper anything to her."

"No, I would not think of alarming her."

"Now, Louis, tell me all you know."

"Mr. Burfield, excuse me, but I have made a resolve to find out all about the Red Hand, and to bring the rascals to justice."

"You have? Will you tell me why?"

"Because, sir, they ought to be in prison."

"Do you know the danger?"

"I do."

"Will you not tell me what you know?"

"That would not be fair, unless you tell me why you have been followed by the conspirators."

"I do not know. I—— But here is Elaine; I hear her voice, so not a word more."

Elaine was accompanied by her maid, Frances.

"Papa, I want to tell you a most singular thing. You remember I told you that there was the impress of a red hand on my door at the hotel——"

"Yes, my dear; some unfortunate fireman must have hurt his hand."

"But, papa, there is something more than that, for Frances found just such a hand——"

"Where?"

"On her night wrapper."

"Ha, ha, ha! Some practical joke Frances has been playing."

"Please, sir, it was no joke. There was the mark of a man's hand on my wrapper, and it was as red as blood."

"It is strange; we will see into this, Frances. Don't talk about it."

The girl was dismissed, and left the room.

Elaine, however, could not help saying:

"It is very strange, papa, and you ought to tell the police."

Dinner was soon served, and the Red Hand was no more discussed.

"Louis, what are your prospects for the future?"

Clarence Burfield asked the question abruptly, and Louis was taken unawares.

"I do not know, sir. I am looking for employment, but only as a means to the one end I spoke to you about."

"You say you would like to be a detective; is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then if you like I will introduce you to Wells Montgomery. You have heard of him?"

"Oh, yes; he is the greatest detective in New York."

"Would you like to know him?"

"Very much, sir."

"I will speak to him about you."

Louis thanked Mr. Burfield, and the subject dropped.

Elaine was exceedingly pleasant, and did all she could to make Louis happy.

He had always liked the companionship of the opposite sex, but had thought girls were inferior to boys in very many ways.

His afternoon spent with Elaine made him feel that if all girls were like her, it was no wonder poets and artists always depicted angels as belonging to the fair sex.

After dinner Burfield had another talk with Louis about the Red Hand mystery, and begged of him to relinquish all ideas of investigation.

"It can do no good. You will only bring misery, perhaps death, on yourself, and when the clearest-headed detectives have failed, it is scarcely likely that you would succeed."

"I can try."

"Yes; but I am under a deep obligation to you, and I should feel myself to blame if anything happened to you."

"Why?"

"Because it was through my daughter that you first heard of that awful sign."

"I appreciate your kind thoughtfulness, Mr. Burfield, but I can assure you I resolved on my life work before I knew you."

It was an equivocation, but perhaps justifiable from his standpoint.

CHAPTER XI.

SEEKING EMPLOYMENT.

All the next day Louis spent searching for employment.

He had talked over the matter with Jim Fenton, and both had agreed that nothing could be done during the daytime, for it was at night that the members of the League of the Red Hand worked.

There was another consideration.

It was necessary to live, and Louis knew it was only by working that he could pay his board.

He sought some employment where he could be sure of having his evenings free.

He entered an office downtown where a notice appeared in the window that a boy was wanted.

"Well?"

"You want a boy, I believe, sir?"

"Yes."

"Will I suit you?"

"That I cannot say. Where were you last employed?"

"I have not been employed anywhere, sir."

"Then don't waste my time. I can only employ a boy who has had experience. Good-day."

"I wonder how a boy gets a start?" Louis thought, as he descended the stairs and passed out into the street.

He had copied all the advertisements from the morning paper which seemed to offer opportunities, and he applied at several of the places indicated, only to find that the advertisements emanated from an employment agency, and that on payment of a dollar they would tell him of any vacancy.

"What can you do?" inquired a merchant who had advertised for an entry clerk.

Louis answered by telling how he had passed at school, but the merchant laughed.

"I guess you know more about algebra than you do about bookkeeping."

"I know a little about bookkeeping."

"Oh, you do, eh? Let me see your writing."

Louis wrote a good hand. The merchant seemed pleased.

"All right, you'll do. You can start to-morrow morning. Be here at eight o'clock sharp."

"How much wages do you pay, please, sir?"

"Well, I'm blessed! You ought to think yourself lucky that you are allowed to work in an office like this, as you only just left school. Well, I'll give you a dollar a week."

"But, sir, I could not live on that."

"What has that to do with me? I don't go about looking after boys to keep. I'm no philanthropist."

"But, please, sir, I have no one to support me, and I must pay for my board."

"Very well, just as you like. I'll not pay you more than a dollar."

"If I accept that the first week, will you raise my wages if I suit you?"

"Yes—yes. Come in the morning."

"You will raise my wages the second week, sir?"

"Bless my heart, no! After the first year or so I may if you are worth more."

As Louis was going out of the office he overheard a conversation not intended for his ears.

One of the firm was gently upbraiding his partner for only offering one dollar a week.

"The boy is worth five or nothing."

"Well, do you think I don't know? But he is evidently hard pressed, and he'll come back and agree to take the dollar."

"He could not live on that."

"That is his lookout. He could get a cheap lodging for ten cents a night——"

"And room with thieves, perhaps."

"And then he would have thirty cents for food. Three bread rolls a day are nourishing, and they would only cost twenty-one cents; then he would have nine for luxuries on Sunday."

"Perhaps before he had been here a month he would be taught to be a thief——"

"Well, then, he'd get into the Tombs."

Louis heard every word, and he felt miserable. He had no idea there were such hard-hearted men in the world, but as Fenton told him, so he began to think, that it was by such meanness that some men got rich.

Some places were already filled, while others were either unsuitable or no wages worth speaking of were paid.

Near the close of the day he bought a late edition of an evening paper, but found that there were no advertisements.

He had wasted his cent.

It was with heavy heart that he returned to Fenton's flat, but the good-hearted fireman bade him keep up his spirits.

"You know, Louis, Rome wasn't built in a day, and it takes time to get a footing in New York; but when you do you will rise until—well, I wouldn't be surprised if some day Jim Fenton called at the City Hall to see his honor, Mayor Stanhope."

"If ever you do, Jim, if ever I became mayor, I'd make you president of the fire commissioners."

"Then I'll promise you my vote at once."

Jim started whistling, a habit his sister had tried to get him to relinquish, but without result.

He wasn't a good whistler, but when he did indulge the tune was original, and Louis asked him if he had cultivated the whistle with a particular object.

"What object could I have?"

"Well, you know, in days of old—"

"When knights were bold," added Jim.

"Yes; in those days when a lady was shut up in some fortress or castle, so that she should not see her lover-knight, he would go from place to place and play and sing some particular song only he and she knew. When she heard it she would sing the second verse, and by that means the knight found his ladylove."

"That's the only song I can sing," said Jim.

"Well, don't sing it, Jim, there's a dear, good boy," Madeline implored; but Louis asked what song it was, and Jim sang it, in a voice as hoarse as a foghorn, and as much out of tune as a street band:

"Gayly the troubadour
Sang, oh! kafoozalum,
As he was hastening
Home from Jerusalem,
Saying from Palestine
Hither I come,
Ladylove! Ladylove!
Rum, tum, tum!"

"Loudly the troubadour
Sang, oh! kafoozalum,
To all the persons
Coming from Jerusalem;
People from Palestine
Looked rather glum
When they heard his absurd
Rum, tum, tum!"

"Daily the troubadour
Sang, oh! kafoozalum,
Till he became
As old as Methusalum.
Then on a bank he sank
Quite overcome:
Autograph, epitaph.
Rum, tum, tum!"

"Do you think my ladylove would know me if I sang that?" asked Jim, laughingly.

"I pity your ladylove, if ever you get one. I don't know which is the worst, your snoring, which I can hear in the next room, or your singing," Madeline cruelly remarked.

"If ever I hear that song," said Louis, "sung in that manner, I shall know that it is sung by Jim Fenton."

"Yes; no one could successfully imitate me."

"I should hope not, Jim. One in a world is quite enough. You are a real good brother, but your singing and whistling is execrable."

"Therein lies its charm, my dear, for I can never be lost if my friends can hear my melodious voice."

"That is true."

"You will never make a living by your singing, Jim," Louis asserted.

"And you, too! Well, well, it seems all my friends are against me. What are you going to do with yourself this evening, Louis?"

"I shall take a stroll; will you come?"

"No, I have to go back to the engine house, but Madeline will."

"Will you go, Miss Fenton?"

"Not if you call me miss. If I cannot be called Madeline, or better, Madge, I'll stay at home."

CHAPTER XII.

UNGALLANT CONDUCT.

"So you feel dispirited because you did not get a situation to-day?"

"Yes, Madge, I do."

"If you are despondent you'll never get a position. No one wants to engage a miserable-faced boy. Cheer up and all will be well."

"It is very kind of you, Madge, to cheer me like that, but it is not pleasant to live with Jim and not be able to pay for my board."

"Isn't it? Now, my dear Louis, that is where you make a mistake. Every cent is charged against you, and some day, when you are in a good position, we shall say: 'Pay us what you owe.'"

The young people had strolled into Broadway, above Twenty-third Street.

Although Louis had seen it often illuminated at night, he could not help exclaiming:

"Is it not lovely?"

Madeline agreed with him, as will every one who has walked along Broadway from Twenty-third Street to Forty-second Street.

The rich displays in the windows, the artistic designs, the masses of rare flowers in the florists', the myriads of large and small electric lights, the broad pavements, on which hundreds of the most beautiful women and fine-looking men are walking toward the theater, is a sight which no city in the world can equal, and only Paris can approach anyway near.

There was to be a performance of "Il Trovatore" at the Metropolitan Opera House, then just opened, and some of the most distinguished singers in the world were to take part.

To Madeline Fenton it was a treat to stand on the sidewalk and watch the people enter the building.

She seemed to know all the wealthy boxholders, just through the glimpse she got of them as they crossed from their carriages to the entrance.

"See, Louis, that is the Goelet carriage."

The ladies were each identified by Madeline, and their costumes criticised.

Carriage after carriage deposited on the sidewalk the leading members of New York fashionable society.

The Astors, Van Rensselaers, Vanderbilts, Hamiltons and others followed in quick succession, and Louis watched them as eagerly as did his companion.

Just behind him were two men, who pushed their way to the front as much as possible, and stretched their necks to catch a glimpse of the opera goers.

Louis had thought them very rude to push as they did, but took no further notice until he heard one say:

"Stays at the St. James, eh? Well, they won't stay long."

Louis became interested, for to him it seemed that only the Burfields stayed at that hotel, and the remarks must apply to them.

He was more than ever convinced when the other said:

"Pretty girl, that daughter. Must she go, too?"

"Yes; the whole kit of them."

"I don't see why."

"We have nothing to do with that. We have to obey orders."

"Will they be here to-night?"

"Don't know; we must watch."

Then the conversation ceased.

The crowd criticised the costumes, and commented on the beauty of the ladies.

A modest coach stopped at the entrance. It was a hired coach.

The people did not feel much interest in its occupants.

Louis saw Clarence Burfield and his daughter step from the coach and pass into the opera house.

"Thought so! Now to tell the boys. Our fortune may be made."

Louis looked around and saw the two men move away from the entrance.

He forgot all about Madeline.

Only one thought filled his mind. These men must be the Red Hand conspirators.

He followed them.

Down Broadway they walked quickly, without looking back.

When they reached Twenty-fourth Street they turned toward Sixth Avenue.

At the corner they looked around.

An exclamation broke from one:

"We're followed!"

Louis heard it and crossed the street.

He looked into a saloon window and read a playbill, but managed to glance across the street at the two men.

When they had got some little distance down the street he followed.

They turned up Sixth Avenue, and walked quickly, but Louis kept them in sight.

Down Twenty-ninth Street as far as Seventh Avenue, and then they stopped.

Louis stopped also. The men began to run; so did he.

They went up one street and down another, doubling sometimes, but Louis kept up with them until they entered a street which had long been a notorious one in the Tenderloin.

Louis lost sight of them. The street was dark.

He felt that they had gained on him, and he walked faster than before.

Scarcely a respectable person lived in the street, though Louis was unaware of the fact.

He was angry to think he had lost track of the men, and was hesitating whether to return to the opera house and watch for the exit of Burfield, or go to the St. James and wait there.

While he was hesitating he felt some one behind him.

He only half turned, but in that instant he recognized one of the men he had been following.

A coat was thrown over his head; a sickening odor seemed to overpower his senses, and he lost all control of his voice.

He kicked vigorously, but it was of no avail.

He was hustled along, and finally carried into a house and thrown on the floor.

"You'll follow your betters again, won't you, my hearty?" exclaimed one of the men, sarcastically, as he closed and locked the door and passed out into the street.

CHAPTER XIII.

"TAKE CARE YOU DO NOT GET CAUGHT IN YOUR OWN TRAP."

For some minutes Madeline Fenton stood entranced by the sight of the gorgeous costumes worn by the ladies who entered the opera house, and did not miss her escort.

In fact, she had forgotten all about him, which was only natural, for what does a boy know about ladies' costumes?

What interest had he in gorgeous apparel?

Madeline was a romantic girl; she read many of those stories whose plots all turn on poor girls marrying very wealthy men, and she could not see why she should not be one of the lucky ones.

She heard a lady's name mentioned, and as she looked across, the quantity of diamonds worn by her almost blinded the on-lookers, and Madeline knew that the lady had been only a poor girl a few years before.

"Louis, how would I look if dressed like that?"

It was not Louis who answered, but a heavily bearded man, who, in a voice deep and musical, said:

"Diamonds may dazzle the eye, but the heart of the wearer is often sad."

Madeline was frightened to hear a stranger reply to her.

She looked around for Louis, but, as we know, she looked in vain.

What could have become of him?

Madeline was a genuine American girl, and therefore not afraid of anything, yet she did feel some alarm at being left alone in that crowd.

She was afraid to leave for fear Louis should return, and still more did she feel that her presence alone might lead to unpleasant remarks.

The man who had spoken to her, or rather the one who had made the remark which was so apropos, looked benevolent and kind.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I was speaking to my young friend."

"Ah, a bright boy, scarcely any taller than you, who stood by your side just now?"

"Yes, sir."

"He has gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes; two men were standing close to you talking, and your companion felt interested. When they left he followed them."

"Thank you, sir."

"Have you far to go?"

"No, thank you; I know my way quite well, and it is only a short distance."

Madeline lost all interest in the late arrivals at the opera; she wanted to get home as soon as she could, to find whether Louis had returned.

"Why, child, where is Louis?" her aunt asked as soon as Madeline entered the flat.

"Has he not returned, aunt?"

"No, Madge; you surely have not lost him?"

"I do not understand; I will go around to the house; perhaps he is with Jim."

"What do you want to trouble about him at all for? He is only a boy, or he would never have left you in the street."

"I heard he followed two men."

"Well, if he likes the company of men better than that of a pretty girl, let him go."

Aunt Cortwright did not like boys. They were her aversion.

She told her nephew Jim that he would rue the day he took Louis to board.

But Jim laughed at her, and she said no more, for she was under obligations to him. She was in a situation where the salary was small, but Jim gave her a room in his flat and partial board, so she lived very comfortably, and in return she was company for Madeline.

Aunt Cortwright secretly looked forward to a time when Madeline would marry and leave, when it would be only natural that she would remain as housekeeper. She never thought that Jim might marry.

Madeline made no reply to her aunt's last remark, but hurried to the engine house where Jim was on duty.

"Hello, Madge! What fair wind blew you here? Where's Louis?"

"That is what I want to know, Jim."

"What?"

She told all she knew, and Jim whistled.

He did not stop whistling for a full minute, but when he did there was a frown on his forehead.

"It is all my fault. I——"

"Your fault?"

"Oh, you don't understand, Madge. Louis thinks he has got a mission. Run away home; I'll try and find the boy."

"But can you get away?"

"Fortunately Rowley Barnes just came in, and I can get him to stay an hour for me."

"Where are you going, Jim?"

"I only know one place, Madge, and that's a fact."

"Where is that?"

"I shall go to the St. James Hotel to see Mr. Burfield."

"He is at the opera; Louis almost went crazy when he saw Miss Burfield enter with her father."

"Jealous, eh?"

"Jealous, indeed, over a chit of a boy! Jim, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Jim only laughed, but his laughter made his sister more angry.

"Is it pleasant to hear him always talking about Elaine, as he calls her? Is it nice to hear her features praised, her dresses admired, her singing and playing eulogized, when I'm sure I am just as good a girl as she is, only I am not as rich?"

"But he is only a chit of a boy, you know."

"He was my escort, and he ran away from me to follow two horrid men."

"Now, my dear Madge, do go home. I will find him for you even if I have to walk through every street, singing:

"Gayly the troubadour

Sang, oh! kafoozalum,

As he was hastening home

From Jerusalem."

"Stop, Jim, please. I'll go home; I'll go anywhere, rather than hear you sing that horrid thing!"

"Suiting the action to the word, and the word to the action!" as the poet says," Jim muttered as he saw Madeline start for home.

Rowley Barnes agreed to do duty for Jim that evening.

As Fenton was leaving, Rowley managed to whisper to him:

"Beware the Red Hand!"

Jim staggered back. The words were a shock.

He wondered what Rowley meant, and yet for a moment he dared not ask him.

"What's the matter, Jim? Aren't you well?" asked Rowley.

"Yes—no—at least I had a giddy feeling just then. What did you mean about the Red Hand?"

"Nothing."

"But you must have meant something. What was it?"

"I don't know; only I heard you talk in your sleep once."

"Talk in my sleep?"

"Yes."

"What did I say?"

"Nothing much."

"What did I say?" repeated Jim, almost angrily.

"You needn't get mad. You only said the only thing you ever feared was a red hand. I don't know what you meant."

"Oh, that was after the fire, when we both saw how some one had slapped a bleeding hand against the door."

"No; it was before the fire. I wonder what it meant?"

"What?"

"Why, the hand, of course."

"Rowley, if I didn't know that you were a temperance man, I should say you had been drinking."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jim wondered which way to go to search for Louis.

He did not like the way the boy left Madeline, and was sure something unusual had been the cause of it.

He went to the hotel and asked if any inquiries had been made for Mr. Burfield, and finding that no one had been there he determined to go to the opera house and find Burfield and warn him.

As a fireman he would have no difficulty in entering, and he was sure the name of Burfield would be known at the box office. But again he was doomed to suffer disappointment, for the wealthy Southerner had modestly purchased two seats, and so had not given his name.

Jim was leaving the opera house when he was tapped on the shoulder by Wells Montgomery.

"Hello, Fenton! On duty here?"

"No, Mr. Montgomery."

"Oh, taking in the show, eh? I hear you are fond of singing."

"I may be and I may be not, but I was only looking for a gentleman, whose name I know, but whom I could not recognize."

"Who is it? I may help you."

"Mr. Clarence Burfield."

"Yes, I can help you. I was speaking with him a few moments ago."

"Will you tell me how I can reach him?"

"My dear fellow, you cannot do anything of the kind. Your dress is not quite correct for the stalls, and you would cause as much excitement as a policeman in uniform."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Call at his hotel to-morrow."

"That will be too late."

"Why?"

"I have reason to believe that some danger threatens him."

"Danger?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you know about it?"

"Nothing, only a suspicion."

Wells Montgomery bent his head forward until his face was very close to that of Fireman Fenton.

"A suspicion that the League of the Red Hand is at its old work, eh?"

"What do you know about it?"

"A mere nothing, only there is such a league, is there not?"

"I have heard so."

"So have I, and I am going to startle the world by unmasking the rascals. I fancy some of the members will be found wearing official uniforms."

"I hope you will succeed, sir. From my heart I do."

"I'll give Burfield your message, if you like."

"Please do so. Tell him to be careful."

"All right; I hear the music commencing again, and the opera is my pet weakness. By-by, fireman."

CHAPTER XIV.

"REMEMBER YOUR OATH!"

In a large room on the second floor of a house in a street famous or notorious for the number of crimes committed in its vicinity, a man walked to and fro uneasily.

He wore a long robe, which completely covered his clothes, and his face was masked.

"I am tired of it!" he muttered. "Heartily tired of it. I wish I could break away, but that is impossible. I must go through with it now, though I know the prison or the gallows is at the end."

The room was nearly dark, only a very feeble light was emitted from the gas burner, and the windows were draped with heavy black felt.

Before the members could enter the large room they had to pass through two smaller ones.

To the first they were admitted after giving a password, which was easy enough to remember, though through its frequent change was absolutely safe to use.

From that room they passed into another, again giving a password which differed from the one which was the open sesame of the first room.

In that second room, into which only one was admitted at a time, the initiated put on the black robe and mask which destroyed all chance of recognition.

Even then a third password was necessary before the masked member of the society could enter the large room.

There was a peculiarity about the society of which we are writing—no conversation was allowed between the members.

Everything was stated openly in the meeting, and when the proceedings were over, the members left singly, and with as much ceremony as they had gone through on entering.

On this particular evening, a large number of members attended.

At one end of the room thirteen chairs were arranged, while at the other end seven were placed, and on each side five.

There was a method in this strange arrangement of the room.

There were thirteen apostles selected to found the Christian religion, and there are thirteen lunar months in the year.

The seven was typical of the seven ages of man and the seven wonders of the world, while the five chairs represented the five races into which mankind is divided, viz., the Caucasian, the Ethiopian, the Mongolian, the Malay and the Indian; and, secondarily, the five fingers of each hand.

To the initiated a lesson was conveyed which, briefly translated, would mean that the five fingers are necessary to the perfect work of man, and that labor is the bond which unites the entire mankind in one family; it was by labor that the seven wonders of the world were created, and the labor must continue through the seven ages of man during the thirteen lunar months of every year. The thirteen was also to teach that the times and seasons were regulated by that mysterious power which was more intelligently explained by the Christ, who sent the thirteen to preach His doctrines.

As the members entered, each took a seat which had been allotted to him.

The center chair of the thirteen was placed a few inches in advance of the others.

Its occupant arose, and in a few words called the meeting to order.

"The time has come when the Red Hand must strike," he said. "The general order went forth against No. 99 and his family, but the general order failed. It now becomes our duty to invoke the power of the special order."

"It is my duty to tell you, as I have done before, what the special order is."

"One of us will be selected, and to that one particulars will be given as to the identity of the offending party."

"It will be the duty of that one to use what weapons he pleases, but he must rid the earth of one or more mentioned in the order."

"It will be impossible to escape the consequences if the brother fails."

"He will be watched, and at the very moment his time expires

for the commission of the act of retribution, he will cease to live if he has failed.

"It will be equally dangerous to betray the society, for the vengeance of the Red Hand has never failed to fall upon traitors."

The speaker did not raise his voice, but uttered the words monotonously, just loud enough to be heard by all present.

Thirty slips of paper were procured, and on one of them was stamped a red hand, all the rest being perfectly blank.

The papers were then folded and placed in a box, covered with a black cloth.

Under this cloth each member in turn placed his hand and drew forth one of the pieces of paper.

Not one opened the folded ballot until all had drawn, and the presiding officer gave the word.

One of the seven at the end opposite the presiding officer had the paper on which the Red Hand was stamped.

He stepped into the center of the room, gave the usual sign for recognition, and handed the paper to the president.

"You will receive your instructions later, brother."

"I would like to ask, is there no way of escaping from this work?"

"Why does the brother ask?"

"My soul loathes it. I joined the league believing its mission was one of truth, justice, morality and charity. I find it——"

"Your oath! Have you forgotten it?"

"No, or I should not be here."

"Then you are not a free agent. You are bound by your oath to obey the orders of the league."

"But I did not know that my oath would make me a——"

"You are indiscreet. You know not what you are saying. Brother, if you are not prepared to obey the orders of the league——"

"I will obey."

"Of course you will; but remember, also, that we each took an equal chance. The lot might have been drawn by me."

"I wish it had; you always escape."

"Do you imply anything unfair?"

"No, only your good luck never leaves you."

The member stepped back, and another took his place.

"In pursuance of orders, No. 99 entered the Metropolitan Opera House to-night. We have reason to believe that he has engaged some one to protect him. A boy listened to our talk; he heard nothing which would betray us, but he followed us for half an hour. His presence meant danger. It was only by a sudden *coup* that we saved ourselves."

"Where is he?"

"At the house of a brother."

"Good!"

"What is to become of him?"

"I will see him."

The member wrote an address on a slip of paper, and gave it to the president.

Other reports were made, and the business was transacted.

One by one the members filed out, only one being allowed in the disrobing-room or in the anteroom at a time.

The member who had drawn the Red Hand ballot stood until all had left save the president.

A few minutes' conversation in a whisper conveyed the instructions to the avenging agent of the League of the Red Hand.

In a short space of time the chairs were moved so that their peculiar regularity was broken and the lights turned out.

CHAPTER XV.

"I CONDEMNED MY OWN CHILD."

The exquisite rendering of the opera charmed all who were able to enjoy the musical treat.

Elaine Burfield was in a new world.

It was the first time she had been to grand opera.

She had heard operas sung, and had seen various *prima donnas*, but though she had enjoyed them, she now knew that it was only in the Metropolitan Opera House, in New York, that the great works of the musicians were really fittingly rendered.

"Oh, papa, is it not grand?" she asked a score of times during the evening.

The scenery was realistic, the costumes rich and historically true, half a million dollars' worth of diamonds flashed from the necks and ears of the ladies in the boxes, only to have their ef-

fulgence flashed back from nearly as many precious gems worn by the ladies on the stage.

It was a dazzling spectacle.

"Papa, I'd like to be a singer."

"*Prima donna*, of course?"

"You always laugh at my ambition. I think it is just grand to see the adulation bestowed on the *prima donna*. See the bouquets, the rich tributes of admirers, listen to the applause. I'd rather be the recipient of such tributes than Queen of England."

"Well, my dear, content yourself with knowing you will never have the chance of being queen, and yet that is as likely as you ever being an operatic success."

The music had commenced again, when Wells Montgomery passed through the aisle, and occupied a seat at Burfield's right.

All through the act, Wells Montgomery endeavored to speak to Burfield, but the Southerner was so charmed with the music that he would not allow any interruption.

Montgomery's seat was several rows farther back, but he was so well known that the ushers never thought of interfering with him.

When the act was over, he whispered:

"Do you know a fireman named Fenton?"

"I have heard of him. He is the friend of that brave boy——"

"Yes, yes, I know all that! Fenton has been here——"

"At the opera?"

"Yes."

"Why not? I would have sent him seats if I had thought——"

"Not inside. I saw him meandering around, looking for you."

"For me?"

"Yes."

"What does he want?"

"Don't laugh when I tell you. He has got an idea that you are in danger. I trapped him. I think he knows something about the League of the Red Hand."

"What makes you think so?"

"My dear sir, I never tell any one why I think a certain thing. I reason out every little thing, and, in fact, get quite a credit for prophecy."

Elaine leaned forward, and exclaimed:

"You are a mind-reader, then. Oh, do tell me something—tell me what I am thinking about?"

"That, Miss Burfield, is very easy. You are thinking that you are more beautiful than the *prima donna*, that your voice is as good, only it needs training, and that you would make a success on the stage."

"You are a—what shall I call you?"

"Do you see that young man who has just entered that box?"

"Yes."

"He is English; landed to-day, dined with some friends, is introduced to Miss Lotsocash, and he will marry her before Easter."

"How do you know? Did he meet her on the other side?"

"No; he never saw her before. You want to know how I find out such things, so does your papa, so I will tell you. He is English, because no other nationality possesses such a color and well-polished skin; then his clothes—even the regulation claw-hammer coat—shows he is English; it does not fit him, and is baggy, like all English coats."

"But what made you think he landed to-day?"

"Because, since he has been in the opera house he has noticed that he has on an English tie, tied in English fashion. If he had been here a day or two, he would not have fallen into that mistake; it has made him quite uneasy."

"Well reasoned, Montgomery; but I am as curious to hear all your deductions as Elaine, so tell us why you think he will marry Gwendolin Lotsocash?"

"That is easy. He looked around the house, and asked his friends who the pretty girls were. I think he asked which was the richest, for he wished to be introduced to the Lotsocash family, and so I guess he is looking for a rich wife. She wants an English husband, and as there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, he will propose and be accepted as quickly as decorum allows."

The music again commenced, and Elaine devoted her time to the stage.

"Be on your guard, Burfield; I am inclined to think there is danger."

"What would you advise?"

"Are you going back to the hotel?"

"Yes."

"Refuse to see any one to-night."

"I will."

"I wish you were not returning, but if you take care, you will be all right, and I may have some news for you in the morning." Jim Fenton was not easy in his mind.

He did not like the absence of Louis, and he was afraid some danger threatened Clarence Burfield.

Fenton never trusted Montgomery; for some reason he did not like him.

If he had been asked the reason, he would have had to say he did not know, or he might have answered, in the words of the poet:

"I do not like thee, Dr. Fell;
The reason why, I cannot tell."

So, having a distrust of the great detective, Fenton thought he would see Miss Burfield's maid, and leave a message with her.

He returned to the hotel, only to be told that Frances had been given an evening out.

The girl had an aunt living in New York, and to her house she went to spend the evening.

Elaine had been considerate, and told her that she need not return until morning if she liked to stay with her aunt.

It was getting late when Mrs. Camp, the aunt, heard a ring at the bell.

"I wonder who it can be?"

"Shall I go, aunt?"

"Lor' bless you, no, child; you don't know this city as well as I do. You might be knocked down and killed before you could say 'Jack Robinson.'"

Worthy Mrs. Camp did not say what connection there was between Jack Robinson and getting killed, or how the uttering of that mysterious person's name would help the girl.

"Perhaps it's Uncle Joe."

"No, Frances, your uncle won't be home before midnight. Won't he be surprised?"

Mrs. Camp went downstairs to see who it was ringing the bell. She occupied the upper part of a small house up in Harlem.

Frances heard the sudden exclamation:

"Oh, George, what a start you've given me! Well, this is a great surprise. Go right on up; there is another surprise up there."

The man addressed as George, a fine-looking, tall man, entered the parlor.

"Father!"

"Frankie!"

The girl had thrown herself into her father's arms, just as much surprised at seeing him as he was to meet her.

It was, indeed, George Meredith, Mrs. Camp's brother and the father of Frances.

"When did you come, father?"

"Early this morning. I had some business, and shall be away again to-morrow, but how is it I find you in New York?"

"My young lady is here."

"Oh!"

"She is such a dear, good creature, and I am going all over the world with her."

"I don't understand. I thought Mrs. Weathersfield objected to traveling."

"So she does, but I left her three months ago, and went back to Miss Burfield."

"What do you say—what name was that?" George asked, excitedly.

"I wrote you at the time, father, but you never answered."

"I never got the letter. Who are you with?"

"Miss Burfield."

"What is her first name?"

"Elaine."

"Her father's first name?"

"Clarence."

George Meredith jumped off the chair; his eyes seemed to be starting from his head, his face was alternately white and red.

"You are with Clarence Burfield?" he asked.

"With his daughter, yes. But what is the matter, father? Do you know him?"

"No, no; I am agitated. I heard he was in the hotel that was burned. Were you there, also?"

"Yes; a brave fireman saved me."

"I—I am glad. What should I have done if you had been injured?"

"You are ill, father?"

"It is nothing. Your aunt is getting me a cup of coffee—I'll be better then. Fetch me a glass of water, quick, my dear."

Frances left the room to get the water.

Her father groaned with mental anguish.

"Great Heaven! I have condemned my own child to death! What shall I do? Oh, curse the Red Hand! My daughter—my daughter! And I ordered it! I—I am her murderer!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A GUILTY CONSCIENCE.

George Meredith had given the strictest orders to the member of the League of the Red Hand.

There was no equivocation.

The order was to "remove" the three persons who had received the warning of the Red Hand at the burning of the hotel.

And one of those persons was his own daughter!

He did not know it when the order was given, but as a man he ought to have thought that the maid was some other man's daughter, and under the circumstances, entirely innocent of any attempt to injure the members of the league.

Secret societies like the Ku-Klux, the White Caps and the Red Hand never act from the plane of humanity.

They strike, and their blow often falls on the head of the innocent.

George Meredith was like a crazy man when he heard Frances say she was Elaine Burfield's maid.

Frances returned with a glass of water, cold as ice, but none too cold for her father's parched throat.

"Are you better, father?" she asked, as his trembling hand took the glass.

"Yes—no—I am ill. I must go home."

"But you are not well enough to travel; at least, you must not go out again to-night."

"To-night? No; there is a train at three-forty; we must catch that."

"We?"

"Yes, you must go with me."

"But, father, I cannot."

"Cannot?"

"No; I must return to Miss Burfield in the morning."

"You must go with me. I am your father, and—"

"I shall not break my word to Miss Burfield. Here is aunt; she will tell you that I am comfortable."

There was something so wild-looking about George Meredith that his sister was positively frightened.

He raved like a maniac; he paced the floor deliriously, and his eyes seemed as though they were starting from his head.

"What is the matter, George?"

"I am ill; I must go home, and Frances must go with me."

"You had better get to bed."

"No, no; I will stay here until it is time for the train to start."

Mrs. Camp slipped out of the room just in time to meet her husband on the stairs.

"Go for the doctor, Joe."

"What is the matter?"

"George is here, and I think he has gone mad. He talks about killing some one, and raves awfully."

"Drunk!"

"For shame, Joe! George was never drunk in his life. He is sick; do go for a doctor, there's a good dear, Joe."

Joe Camp was only human, and as he loved his wife as much as the day he married her, some years ago, he made no further demur, but turned back, late as it was, to fetch the doctor in whose skill his wife had so much confidence.

The follower of Æsculapius gave Meredith an opiate, which quickly sent him to sleep.

It was morning when he awoke, and Frances was delighted to find that he was calmer.

"Are you better, father?"

"Yes, my girl. What day is this?"

"Tuesday."

"Ah! so it is. I have been thinking I won't go South. But I have a great surprise for you."

"For me?"

"Yes; we will go to Europe to-morrow. You shall stay with

me until then, and we will go across the ocean, and there commence a new life together."

"What has come over you, father?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Why do you talk so strangely?"

"My dear, you need a change. I am going to take you to Europe."

"I cannot go."

"You must."

All the strong will power possessed by Frances was aroused.

She looked at her father almost defiantly as she, with emphasis, replied:

"I will not!"

"Remember, you are my daughter, and it is your place to obey."

"Father, listen to me. Four years ago, when mother died, you forgot I was your daughter; you neglected me, and I had to go out and work for a living. I had a hard struggle, but at length I won my way. I went to Mrs. Weathersfield; she treated me well. I stayed with her until recently, when, at her desire, I left her to go with the sweetest girl that ever lived. Now you come forward and tell me I must obey you. I would be pleased to do so, father, but duty forbids."

"Duty! You forget that your first duty is to me, but I forgive that. I must go to Europe to-day—at least, to-morrow; no later—and you shall not go back to Burfield's."

"Shall not?"

"I said so."

"And, father, I say that I must go back; I would not have my name so smirched."

"You shall change your name, and I will change mine."

Frances started back, and looked at her father.

"Tell me, father, what is it? Let me be your confidante—let me thing wrong?"

"Oh, Heaven!"

"Tell me, father, what is it? Let me be your confidant—let me know all. You have nothing to fear from me. I will help you, rather than injure you."

"I cannot tell you."

"Then I must follow my own ideas, for I cannot act in the dark."

"You will ruin yourself. Frankie, by the love you bore your mother, by the love I had for her, don't ask me any questions, but go with me to Europe to-morrow."

"Give me time to think."

"But you won't go back to the Burfields'?"

"I must."

"Go, then, but come back in the evening. Don't sleep with them, I warn you."

Meredith had worked himself up into such a fever that when the doctor called, he again gave him an opiate.

Meredith did not object, for in sleep there came a forgetfulness, and that was better than to remember his crime, for he felt, should anything happen to Frances, he would be responsible.

When he was fast asleep, under the influence of the opiate, his daughter returned to the hotel, and was warmly welcomed back by her young mistress.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOUIS' PRISON HOUSE.

What had become of Louis all this time?

When he was pushed into the room, his senses were half gone, for he knew that the coat thrown over him had been well saturated with chloroform.

He fell on the floor, and gradually sank into that peculiar, deathlike sleep produced by the famous anaesthetic.

He slept on for some time, the return of consciousness being as gradual as had been the effect of the drug.

Gradually, the events of the night returned to him, and he wondered what had become of Madeline Fenton.

He was ashamed of himself for having deserted her.

"Poor Madge! she will never forgive me. Well, I don't deserve any forgiveness, but what was I to do?"

The oftener he asked himself this question, the more perplexed he became.

His blood grew warm to think how he had failed in his shadow-

ing, for he had been trapped at the very time he thought he was on the trail of the law-defying miscreants.

It was early morning, but the room was dark, and he fancied midnight had only just passed.

Not a sound reached his ears, and he felt that now was his time for escape.

He arose to his feet, but staggered and would have fallen had he not been near a friendly wall.

When his nerves grew steadier, he worked his way along the wall, hoping to find a window.

He easily found the door, but, as he expected, it was locked.

No window seemed to be in the room, and he was the more surprised.

Searching his pockets for a match—he felt sure he had one—occupied his attention for a few moments.

It is surprising what a boy's pockets will hold!

He took out some string, a jackknife—the large blade of which was broken—a piece of lead pencil, a little pocket calendar—one of those advertising celluloid conceits—then he found a bit of chewing-gum which had been given him by Madeline.

That was a fortunate find, for he was hungry.

Then he sorted out some marbles, a little bunch of rings forming a puzzle, which Jim had given him, and at last a match.

The room was so dark that he put all the things back in his pockets before he struck the match, fearing he might lose some of them unless he did.

From another pocket he extracted a piece of newspaper, which he twisted into a kind of torch, fearing that his single match might not give him light long enough.

When he was ready—and he acted very slowly and methodically—he struck the match and lighted his paper torch.

A cry burst involuntarily from his lips as he saw that he was in a large closet, having only a small window near the ceiling, opening, evidently, into an airshaft.

The door was locked, but that did not trouble him, for he saw the lock was of a very common kind, easily opened; but he was afraid the door might be bolted on the other side.

Into his pockets he went again, and produced a bit of steel piano wire, which he had picked up, and, boy-like, put into his pocket.

He tried to bend it, but failed.

That was one blow to his hopes, but he was not much discouraged.

On the way to the opera house, Madeline had picked up a long, brass hatpin, and having no immediate use for it, had given it to Louis to carry home for her.

He bent the end of the pin and inserted it into the lock.

As he did so, his paper torch burned out, and the darkness seemed more intense.

He worked away at his attempt to pick a lock, and after a good quarter of an hour he felt the bolt shoot back.

He turned the handle, only to find, as he had feared, that the door was secured by a bolt on the outside.

He sat down on the floor to think.

He did not know where he was, for the room into which he had been pushed was furnished. He remembered sinking on an old-fashioned lounge, but the one he was in was destitute of furniture.

Louis knew then that he had been moved while under the influence of the chloroform, but whether to another house, or to a different room in the same house, he did not know.

His thoughts were far from pleasant, for not only did he experience the keenest pangs of suffering because of his imprisonment, but he wondered what all his friends would think of him.

He had read many stories of adventure and thrilling escapes, and it occurred to him that some of the knowledge might be turned to practical account.

Food would be brought him, and he would watch the opportunity to slip out when the door opened.

The hours dragged wearily on, and no one brought him any food.

To keep up his spirits, he began to whistle.

"I wish I could whistle like Jim—he might hear it," thought Louis, as he whistled as loudly as he could.

When tired of whistling, he tried to remember Jim's song, but he could only get something like it.

There was something weird in the singing of the ridiculous words, and Louis stopped to laugh at himself more than once.

Although he shouted out:

"Loudly the troubadour
Sang, oh! kafoozalum,
To all the persons
Coming from Jerusalem;
People from Palestine
Look'd rather glum
When they heard.
His absurd rum, tum, tum!"

And the words echoed from wall to wall of his small prison house, but there was no responsive answer from the outside.

He climbed up to the little window, and looked through. The aperture was very small, and it would be quite a difficult thing for him to force his body through, but he would risk that if all else failed.

He did not wish to break his limbs or endanger his life, so he resolved to wait for a little before he crawled through the window.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ANGEL OF MERCY.

But once having looked out of the window, and being able to see daylight, he became uneasy, and instead of remaining on the floor, he balanced himself on the window-sill, hanging by his arms and thus secured a little fresh air, though the attitude was very uncomfortable.

He was getting weak from want of food, and wished some one would bring him some, when he saw a string lowered down the shaft.

He was hanging with his arms over the window-sill, so that he might get a breath of fresh air.

The string stopped when opposite him.

On the end was a piece of paper and a pencil.

He looked at the paper, and saw the words at the top:

"You can trust me. What do you want most?"

Still balancing himself with his left arm, he wrote the one word:

"Food."

The cord was drawn up, how high Louis could not say, but in a few minutes it was lowered, and attached to it was a tin pail, and in that pail a chicken leg, some potatoes and bread and butter.

There was a little roll of paper in the bottom of the pail, and his delight was great when he found the paper contained a small candle and some matches.

The food disappeared very quickly, and he again climbed up to the window and attached the empty pail to the cord.

His good and unseen friend was waiting, for the pail was at once drawn up and lowered again in a few minutes. This time it contained a cup of steaming-hot coffee, which was more than refreshing.

He wrote on a little slip of paper:

"Who are you? Let me know, so that I can thank you."

Down came the answer:

"A friend. What can I do for you?"

"I want liberty," was his reply.

"Wait until night. It is six o'clock now. I will do what I can. Do not mention me to any one. Do not tell any one about the food."

There was no need of the caution, for Louis seemed to be entirely forgotten.

It was a long time until night.

He thought the hours would never pass.

All sorts of imaginary fears agonized him.

Suppose his new friend should be prevented assisting him?

What if it should be a trap to still further degrade and injure him?

Then he wondered if the food had been poisoned, and if he would be dead before night came.

Most likely these varied thoughts kept him from losing his reason, for his mind was so active that only constant working could enable it to maintain its balance.

About midnight—it seemed to him a good, long day since six o'clock—he heard a voice singing softly the troubadour's song, and his heart began to beat faster.

There was a grating sound at the door; he felt rather than saw it open, and he knew some one had entered.

The door was closed again, and locked.

"Who are you?" Louis asked, almost afraid of the answer, for fear it might be given in the voice of an enemy.

"Your friend. Speak very low, or I shall be discovered."

The striking of a match and lighting of a candle revealed the outline and form of a young girl.

As she turned her face toward Louis, he was fascinated with its beauty, yet grieved to see the outlines of care stamped so perceptibly there.

"Do not ask me who I am," she said, as she saw the words of inquiry forming in the boy's mind. "I want to save you. I know why you are here. You were suspected of following two men. They had reasons for not wishing to be known, and they are desperate men. Alas! I know that there is no crime too great for them to commit. Your life, my life, would be as nothing. They would not hesitate to sweep us away, as we would flies or spiders. I want to save you, as I have saved others."

"Why? You do not know me?"

"No, I do not know you—I do not want to know you. But one of the men is very dear to me, and I would save him from crime if I can. Don't think too harshly of him. He thinks he is doing a good work, and that it is all for humanity."

"I don't understand you—"

"It is as well, perhaps, if you do not; he thinks he is doing good, but I call his work crime—"

"Is he one of the League of the Red Hand?"

The girl shuddered.

She covered her face with her hands, and her body was convulsed with sobs.

"I did not mean to hurt you; I—"

"I know nothing of what you speak, only do not ever mention the Red Hand again. You would not live long if you did. Do you know where you are?"

"No."

"If you were to be released, you would go straight to the police and tell them about this house?"

"Perhaps I might."

Louis spoke boldly, even though knowing that such a speech might endanger his liberty.

"Will you not promise me never to reveal the locality of this house?"

"For your sweet sake I would do much, and promise much, but I do not think I could promise that."

"Then I am afraid I cannot save you."

"I am sorry, for I want liberty."

The girl thought for a few moments, her face gradually clouding, as the difficulties presented themselves to her mind.

"You see, an injury to any one in this house would be an injury to me."

"That I should regret."

"If I can release you, will you walk three or four blocks blindfolded? I will lead you."

"Yes."

"And you swear never to look, or attempt to look, until I leave you?"

"Yes, I will do that."

"Then, in an hour or so I will return, if I can."

She left the little room, bolting the door behind her.

Louis saw something white on the floor.

He picked it up.

It was a handkerchief.

Gallantly, he pressed it to his lips, inhaling the strong perfume.

"I will keep this ever as a remembrance of her," he said, as he again pressed it to his lips.

The perfume was powerful, so much so that it disguised the odor of the strongest anæsthetic known to science.

He sank back, half dazed. The door again opened. He had just enough consciousness to see two females, but he could not call out or make any resistance.

The elder female held a sponge to his face, and he quickly succumbed.

"I don't think he will tell any one the number of the house or the street," the elder woman said, with a smile.

"No, but I am really sorry. I would like to have spoken with him again."

"You are too soft-hearted, Elmina; I never knew you so before."

"No, mother, I never felt such interest in any one before. He is only a boy, but, oh! so brave!"

"Never mind that now. We have much to do before——"

"Yes, and we are late. Mother, can nothing be done to save father from those horrible men? He is so good, so noble, except when he has to do what they order."

"I am afraid not. Now, Elmina, let us hurry, or we shall fail."

The two women, mother and daughter, lifted him up and carried him out of the house, placing him in an express wagon which was standing by the curb.

"Same place?" asked the expressman.

"Yes; I hope it will be the last time we shall have to ask you to help us."

"I hope so; I wish the men would give up."

"So do I. Good-night."

"Good-night, and Heaven guard you, aunt."

The wagon drove away, and the women re-entered the house.

They so arranged the room in which Louis had been imprisoned that it appeared as though he had forced his body through the little window.

They locked and bolted the door, and with most remarkable quickness they were in bed, prepared to appear fast asleep if the head of the household appeared.

Louis had been gone an hour when the man returned home.

He had the key of the room in his pocket, and had not the faintest idea that any one possessed a duplicate.

His name was Van Ness, and he was a leading member of the Red League.

He unlocked the door, and lighted a match.

"Gone!"

The word was uttered very emphatically, and added to it was some word which sounded much like a curse.

He lighted a lamp, with difficulty, for the wind was blowing furiously through the open window.

"Curse it! I will have some bars put over that window to-morrow. That is the third who has escaped, and the brothers will begin to suspect me if I am not more careful."

He searched in the airshaft, but no trace of Louis could be found, and he never thought of asking his wife or daughter if they knew anything about the prisoner's escape.

CHAPTER XIX.

WAS IT A TRAP?

"Well, puss, are you tired of New York?"

"No, papa dear, I don't think I ever should be tired. It is the grandest, greatest, most glorious city I was ever in."

Elaine Burfield spoke enthusiastically.

She was an impulsive, warm-hearted girl, and her mind was still full of the grand opera she had heard the night before.

The music had thrilled her, the scenery and general stage setting had made her live in the time of the opera, and she fancied herself one of the people of that romantic day.

It was after breakfast that her father had asked the question.

"So you like New York?"

"I dote on it. Papa, cannot we live always here?"

"I don't know, Elaine, but we will think about it later, when you have seen Paris——"

"Paris!"

"Yes; not Paris in the South, but gay, brilliant, fascinating Paris in Europe."

"Are you really going to take me to Europe?"

"Yes. We will see Paris, and Vienna, and Berlin——"

"And London?"

"Yes, of course, we must see London."

"When do we start?"

"As soon as you like."

"I must see New York first."

"Well, puss, what are you going to do to-day?"

"Let me see; I want to go to some of the big stores."

"Naturally."

"And then to the Metropolitan Art Gallery, and the menagerie, and the Natural History Museum——"

"All to-day?"

"No, of course not. It will take days—— But, papa, I will do just what you want me to do."

"What a dear, good, obedient child you are."

"I would like a ride through the park, and——"

"You may not find a cavalier to save your life again."

"Papa, I think you ought to do something for Louis."

"What can I do?"

"Make him your secretary. Let him go with us to Europe. He would enjoy it."

"I have no doubt. Now, my dear girl, take Frances and go to see the stores; whatever you buy I will pay for. Have the things sent here——"

A bell boy entered, carrying a slip of paper, on which was written:

"James Fenton."

"Why, that is the fireman, papa. Let him come up."

"Of course. Send Mr. Fenton up here."

Then, to his daughter, he added:

"Run away; do your shopping, and get back to lunch. I may go out with you in the afternoon."

Jim Fenton entered the private parlor, and felt ill at ease amid so much luxury.

Burfield held out his hand, for he was a true American, and not one of the shoddy aristocracy, who consider a workingman an inferior animal.

"Have you seen him, sir?"

"Whom do you mean?"

"Louis—Louis Stanhope."

Then Jim told all he knew about the boy's mysterious absence from home.

"He followed two men, you say?"

"So Madge—my sister—tells me."

"What for?"

"He thought you were in danger."

"In danger? Of what kind?"

Jim looked around in an exceedingly stogy manner, and being satisfied that no one could overhear him, whispered:

"The Red Hand, sir."

Burfield staggered as if he had been struck.

"What do you know of the Red Hand?"

It was almost a gasp; scarcely were the words recognizable.

"I saw the Red Hand at the fire, sir."

"Oh!"

"It is dangerous. Can you not purchase your freedom?"

"I will not pretend to misunderstand you. I would give a hundred thousand dollars to be free from their threats."

"Make the offer, sir."

"How?"

"Advertise. Put a 'personal' in the morning papers."

"What do you know about the Red Hand?"

"I have heard a great deal, sir."

"I cannot act. I have placed the affair in the hands of Wells Montgomery. Go and see him. Tell him about Louis. Tell him he must find the boy. I will write a line to that effect. Go at once, and—— But there; you must be as anxious to find Louis as I am."

Fenton received the note, and started for the great detective's office.

Elaine, accompanied by Frances, began her tour of the great stores—stores which are a world's wonder, for nowhere in the world can such be found.

She was in one of the most crowded stores, and being thoroughly tired, she sat down in the ladies' parlor, and commissioned Frances to purchase some little thing for her in another department.

She had not been alone more than five minutes, when a well-dressed man entered the parlor, and, bowing very low, asked if she were Miss Burfield.

She answered in the affirmative.

"You were pointed out to me. I came in to look at a directory, as I hoped to find you by that means. A cash girl gave in some parcels at the desk, and mentioned your name. I said I was seeking your address. The child pointed you out. I took the liberty of following, and must ask your pardon for my boldness;

only the most imperative necessity would make me stoop to so ungentlemanly an intrusion."

"What is it you wish?"

Elaine was innocent of the snares and traps of a big city, and believed in the man's honesty.

He handed her a note, which purported to come from Louis Stanhope."

"Come to me at once; I am injured, perhaps fatally. Do not delay, my good lady, for I wish to see you."

"But Louis knew my address."

"Yes, but he became insensible before he could tell us, and I was sent out—I am one of the medical students—to find you."

"Where is he?"

"At the hospital."

"How long will it take us to go?"

"Ten minutes or so."

Elaine called a cash girl.

"You know the young person who was with me?"

"Yes, miss."

"When she comes here for me, give her this card."

"Yes, miss."

Elaine left with the stranger, and when Frances sought her, the cash girl gave her a card on which was written:

"Return to the hotel. I have been sent for to the hospital. Louis is badly injured."

Frances turned pale as she read the words.

She knew more of the world than did Elaine, and she feared that some evil would overtake her young mistress.

CHAPTER XX.

A STRANGE MEETING.

The cold, biting winds and the frosty ground made even the lower animals look for shelter that night.

No one would stay out unless absolutely compelled.

In a remote part of the suburbs of Hoboken, an expressman drove along the road, singing to keep up his courage.

"Oh, my! but it is cold!" he ejaculated, as a gust of wind found its way through the interstices of his clothing and sent the blood back from the surface, leaving him cold and chilled.

"Poor wretch, I hope he will wake soon, though where he will go, goodness only knows. He may be frozen to death before he wakes. But, then, he would have died anyway, and no one can say he was murdered, so if he gets his death to-night, it will be like the story of the old woman who had a sick rooster. She knew the bird would die before morning, so she killed it to save its life, so she said."

The man talked to himself all the time. It was a habit he had acquired. It seemed like having company; besides, it had once prevented him from being "held up," for he distinctly heard a man say:

"It ain't safe; there's two of 'em."

When the man reached some crossroads, he halted his horse and got down, professedly to light his pipe, but really to look around.

Being satisfied that no one was within hearing distance, he lifted Louis out of the wagon and laid him by the roadside.

The boy was still unconscious, and the expressman looked at him for a moment to make sure he was still alive.

Then he drove away.

"Hope he will be all right, but it is a nasty night. Aunt has saved four now; the last, poor chap, never woke up. What a fuss the papers made about it! Another mystery, they said, and they were right; it was a mystery. I could tell all about it, but the doctors decided the man had been drunk and had wandered off by himself, falling down and dying from heart trouble. Wise fellows, those doctors are!"

The man turned his attention to his pipe, and began to mutter to himself about other things.

The cold wind had a reviving effect on Louis.

He shivered, and that was a wholesome sign of returning consciousness.

Then he turned over on his side, as though in bed.

The cold, frosty ground was not comfortable, and he awoke.

"Hello! where am I?"

He tried to think, but everything was confused.

Gradually it came back to him that a girl had promised to release him from his prison.

But she had failed, he thought, and he was lying on the cold floor.

Scarcely had that thought passed with lightning rapidity through his brain before he knew he was in the open air, and not in any room.

He scrambled to his feet.

"I am free!" he shouted, and in his joyousness he leaped in the air, only to find his legs too weak to support him just then, for he sat down with such force that every nerve tingled and the last controlling influence of the chloroform was gone.

"Where am I?"

He looked around, and like the hero of Edgar Poe's "Raven," he saw "darkness there, and nothing more."

Again like that same hero, it was true of him that:

"Deep into the darkness peering,

Long he stood there, wondering, fearing."

"Isn't it cold?" he asked himself, and by way of answer he shivered, and drew his coat more tightly around him.

"Where am I—how did I get here?"

It was no use asking the questions, for there was no one to answer them, and he must remain in ignorance.

He looked up at the sky, and found the polar star.

"I think I will keep that in view and walk until I find some house."

His feet and legs were numb with the cold.

He stamped his feet on the ground, and ran, clapping his hands together to get warm.

For a quarter of an hour he had been running, but no sign of any house was visible.

Reaching a little higher ground, he could see the twinkling of some lights in front of him, and a larger number to his right.

"A village in front, a town on the right," he muttered. "Now, where am I? In New York? No, I don't think so, unless I am away up beyond Harlem. On Long Island? Scarcely, for I don't know of any large town on my right when I face the north. I'll give it up and walk on."

A little farther he came to a sudden halt.

There was a small, old-fashioned looking house just off the road.

There was no light coming from it, so he imagined its inmates were in bed.

He would knock at the door, however, and see if he could arouse them.

The dim light had magnified the size of the house, and he was disappointed when he got close to it.

"Don't think there will be much of a welcome here," he thought; "it looks to me like a powder magazine."

He found a side where he could be sheltered from the wind, and being very tired, he sat down, with his back to the wall.

He was just a little frightened, and he began to whistle.

Somewhat, whistling did not give him the courage he wanted, and he thought the sound of his voice would be better, so he sang Jim Fenton's song:

"Gayly the troubadour sang, oh! kafoozahum!"

He did not sing the words.

Some voice had repeated them.

His heart stood still.

He dared not move; he scarcely dare breathe.

He listened, and he heard a voice asking who he was.

"Where are you?" he cried, in broken, nervous accents.

"In this wretched house; I am a prisoner. Will not the troubadour assist me to escape?"

"A prisoner? What have you done?"

"Nothing. I seem to know your voice. Will you not tell me who you are?"

"Louis Stanhope."

"Am I mad, or am I dreaming? I am Elaine Burfield."

"Great Scott! How came you in there?"

"I cannot tell you now? Where are we?"

"I don't know. I don't know whether we are in New York or—"

"We are in New Jersey, but the location is strange to me. I want to get out."

She explained to him how strong the door was, and how heavily the window was barred.

"I have tried every way to escape, but failed. I have but one chance more——"

"And that is?"

"I might climb up the chimney; it seems large, and there is a big, open fireplace in the room."

"Wait a bit; I will climb to the roof, if I can, and look down."

"You may hurt yourself."

"No, I won't. I can do it, I am sure."

Louis found it easier than he had expected, even though it was so dark.

When he reached the chimney, he called down.

Elaine answered.

"Stand away; I am coming down."

Before Elaine could say anything to prevent him, he had started on his downward journey.

Pressing his knees and his back against the sides of the chimney, he was able to get down easily, for, fortunately, the colonials believed in building good, large flues.

Had there been any light, Elaine would not have been charmed with her young friend's appearance, for he was well covered with soot, cobwebs and dirt.

She told her story—how she had been inveigled into a carriage, under the pretext that she was to see him, and taken there a prisoner—and he told his. When he had finished, she added:

"I was not frightened until I saw a red hand on the wall."

"A red hand?"

"Yes."

"Then I am afraid we will have a hard fight, but when morning comes, we will try and escape, and if we cannot, we will fight for our liberties and our lives."

"Spoken like a real knight! I have every confidence in you, Louis."

"I will save you, Miss Burfield."

"I think you are my good angel——"

"No, no! You are an angel, and for such an angel I would give my life, if need be."

CHAPTER XXI.

"NO ONE CAN AID YOU."

"I don't want you to give your life for me, but I am afraid you have got into further trouble. How did you find me?"

Elaine Burfield was sitting on the floor, very close to Louis Stanhope, whose sooty hand she held in hers.

It was very cold, and the two sat very close together in the communionship of misery.

Somehow, it did not seem so horrible to Louis to be in a prison, so long as he was sharing it with Elaine, who was to him a superior being.

"How did you get here?" he asked, and she told him her story.

"And it was to see me that you followed that man?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

"Had you not twice saved my life?"

"That was nothing."

"Nothing? Thank you, Louis; I thought my life was of some value."

"I did not mean that; I meant that saving it was——"

"Noble, heroic, sublime; and when I heard you were injured, what else could I do but try and see you?"

"I wish you had not."

"Thank you, but I could not help it. I am afraid that there are some evil persons watching us."

"Now?"

"No, you silly boy, I don't mean now, of course, but they want to trap us."

Louis knew that his hand shook as she spoke, but he did not think she noticed it.

"You are trembling. Are you afraid?"

"Not for myself."

"For whom, then?"

"For you, Miss Burfield, and for your father."

"Why?"

He did not know what to say, for he had been very guarded and did not want her to know or suspect anything about the Red Hand.

She saw his hesitation, and tried to help him out.

"Do you think the Red Hand has anything to do with it?"

"The Red Hand! What do you mean?"

"In that awful fire there was a mark of a red hand on the door, and in this room there is a similar mark."

"In this place?"

"Yes. On the stone wall. I saw it, and I became frightened."

"As well you might be. It is a painful coincidence."

"A coincidence! Is it nothing more?"

"No, I think not."

"Tell me of yourself, Louis; I would like to know more about you. Your father, was he——"

She paused, scarcely knowing whether she had trespassed on some forbidden subject.

"He was an artist, and, oh! so clever; but, alas! he was always sick and poor. Mamma had all she could do to support us, but she was brave, and he was so kind and considerate."

"Was your mamma an artist, too?"

"Yes; she painted on china, and such lovely things; you would have liked to see them."

"I am sure I should; but had she no friends, no relatives, who would have helped her to bear her troubles?"

"I do not know. I have heard her say—only to me; never to any one else—that her family was a wealthy one in the South, and that her father died while she was quite young. She had an elder brother, who was kind to her, and loved her greatly until she married my father, and then she was disinherited, cast out, she said, and her brother forbade her ever speaking or writing to him again."

"What was his name?"

"I do not know. Mamma said it would be far better if I remained in ignorance of his name, for then I should never stand in danger of being snubbed by him or her other relatives."

"That was pride."

"Yes; and I am glad she had pride enough to act as she did."

The two young people talked so interestingly that they forgot all about their troubles and danger, and the time passed so rapidly that the sun was shining in the morning before they realized the fact.

The little rays of light entered the room through the window, and Elaine burst into a merry laugh.

"You do look so comical. I do wish you could see yourself."

Louis looked at his hands and clothes, and saw now they were covered with soot.

"Is my face very black?"

"It is black in streaks, and brown and white, and, oh, so funny; I do wish I had a mirror."

Louis laughed just as heartily as did Elaine, though it was only because her description of his appearance was comical.

"Now that the sun is shining, I think we ought to get out of this place."

"So do I, but how?"

"You thought of trying the chimney?"

"And I should look just like you; what a funny couple we should be, and how the people would laugh."

"Miss Burfield, will you try the chimney, or shall we wait here and confront your abductor?"

"The chimney, by all means."

"Very well; I will go first, and you can pull on my hand, and so help yourself up."

"I should pull you down."

"Then will you go first? And I will push you up."

"No, no; I will follow you. I think I can climb."

Louis started up the chimney, and Elaine followed.

They got up three or four feet very nicely, but a sharp piece of mortar pricked Elaine's hand.

She forgot her critical position, and relaxed her hold with her knees; the result was, she fell to the bottom, and had to start over again.

She had ascended a little distance, when Louis called to her:

"Go back; we cannot get out. The top of the chimney has fallen in."

She descended, and a few minutes later Louis was by her side.

As he re-entered the old fortress—for such it was entitled to be called—his eyes fell on the red hand, as though he was to be reminded that he was in the power of that terrible society.

"Miss Burfield——"

"Call me Elaine; I ask of you the favor, for you shall be my brother. Papa will insist, so call me Elaine."

Louis looked at the handsome girl, whose clothes were soiled with the soot and dirt, and whose hand was bleeding, and softly whispered the words:

"Sister! Elaine!"

"That is right. Now, what were you about to say?"

"We must be brave when our enemies come; and will you act as I desire?"

"I will. Hark! wasn't that some one at the door?"

"Yes. Keep silent; I will hide in the chimney."

Louis had only time to get into the opening above the fireplace before the door opened, and the man, Bender, who had kidnaped Elaine on pretense of taking her to see Louis in a hospital, appeared.

"Have you decided?" he asked.

"I have."

"And you will send the order to your father to pay me the money?"

"No."

The man stepped back, startled by the vigor of the reply.

"Then what do you intend doing?"

"Nothing."

"You know the alternative?"

"No, I do not. And, if I did, I should still defy you."

"Defy me? Girl, you are foolish. You are in my power, and not a soul on earth can aid you."

"You lie!" shouted Louis, emerging from the chimney and rushing upon Bender with such force that the villain fell to the floor, and Louis sat down on his prostrate body.

CHAPTER XXII.

"OH! KAFOOZALUM."

Jim Fenton had obtained a week's vacation, and he spent twenty-four hours parading the streets, whistling, in his own peculiar manner, or singing his absurd song.

He was in the Tenderloin district, singing, "Oh! Kafoozalum," when a young girl ran out and called:

"Louis, is that you?"

He turned, and she blushed as she apologized for calling after him.

"What Louis do you mean?" he asked; "for I am seeking a tall boy called by that name."

"A friend of mine, Louis Mann."

"Oh, my friend was named Stanhope."

"And you have lost him?"

"Yes. I would give all I possess to find him."

The girl hesitated a moment, and then she said:

"That was a funny song you were singing. My cousin heard a boy singing it in Hoboken last night, and he remembered some of the words. Can I buy it anywhere?"

"I don't know; what part of Hoboken was it?"

"He did not say; he is an expressman, and drives out about four miles beyond Hoboken."

"Thank you."

"Excuse me for my boldness. I am sure you will think me very forward."

Elmina Van Ness—for it was the daughter of the Red Hand member—ran down the street as though ashamed of having spoken to Jim.

Fenton was too much of a gentleman to follow her, but he would dearly liked to have had another conversation with her.

He reasoned out the situation:

That girl knows Louis. He sang "Kafoozalum," he has been spirited away to Hoboken. I'll go right through to the village she spoke of. It can do no harm, and I may find Louis."

He lost no time in reaching the ferry, and was very impatient at the slight delay in getting the boat and crossing.

He bought a copy of an extra special which the boys were calling out for sale.

He did not know what prompted him to purchase a paper so early in the day, seeing that he had read the morning paper.

But he invested his cent, and saw the announcement, in large, displayed type, of the finding of the body of an Italian floating in the East River.

The body showed a distinct wound made by some instrument in the back, a stab sufficient to cause death.

The doctor who was called to see the body declared that it was

a case of murder, for the man must have been dead when thrown into the water.

What made the affair more sensational was the fact that on the man's shirt there was an impress of a red hand, with the words underneath:

"So perish all traitors!"

The body was almost immediately identified as that of an Italian named Galliani.

There was a short expression of opinion by the writer that Galliani had been the victim of the Mafia, or some other secret society popular among his compatriots.

Jim Fenton trembled as he read the account, for he knew the Italian himself.

"Poor Galliani! He has been killed to close his mouth. Fool that I was ever to join such murderers!"

While Fenton was brooding over the tragedy, Louis Stanhope and his companion, Elaine Burfield, were nearly exhausted through want of food, and almost hopeless.

"What shall we do?" asked Elaine.

"I am afraid we shall die here," was the despairing answer.

Early that morning, when Bender had entered the prison chamber, and had declared that Elaine was entirely in his power, we know Louis had rushed out from his hiding place in the chimney, and by the impetuosity of his onslaught knocked Bender down.

But the man had much to lose, and he struggled with the two, his strength being more than a match for theirs.

Elaine scratched his face and Louis pulled his hair, struck him and kicked with a vigor worthy of a football captain.

But Bender was a powerful and athletic man.

He struck right and left, and knocked Elaine down with a savage blow, and almost before she fell Louis was sprawling on the floor ignominiously.

Bender saw his opportunity, and left the place, taking care to lock the door after him.

When once outside, he shook his fist at the place.

"Neither of you leave there alive! If nothing else will answer, a little giant powder will do the work. You fools! To lose your lives rather than sacrifice half old Burfield's wealth."

But as he cooled a little, he thought he would leave them to starve to death, or get out if they could.

"I have done my duty; why should I risk my life any more? Old Burfield I can easily settle."

There was something contemptible about this man, Bender, as there is about every criminal.

There is nothing heroic in crime.

The boy or man who strives to be notorious as a law-breaker leads the most wretched life, has never an easy moment, and earns the execration of all mankind.

There is nothing in all the universe more loathsome and contemptible than the sneaking criminal who commits murder or robbery on what he calls heroic lines.

Elaine was crying with the pain.

Her cheek was badly bruised, but when she saw Louis hurt also, she forgot her own misery and tended to him like a true woman.

They soothed each other, Louis proud that he had prevented in some measure greater ill-treatment of Elaine, while she was upbraiding herself for leading him into the new trouble.

The hours passed on, and they had cried together, then laughed at their mutual misfortune, tried to escape by the chimney, but failed, and had settled down into a state of almost helpless misery.

The sun was setting, when Louis, half asleep, suddenly aroused himself.

He heard, or imagined, some one singing.

He was sure it was Jim's voice, and it was Jim's song:

"Gayly the troubadour
Sang, oh! kafoozalum,
As he was hastening
Home from Jerusalem."

Louis heard the words distinctly, and without any attempt at keeping to the tune, he shouted out:

"Saying, from Palestine
Hither I come,
Ladylove! ladylove!
Rum, tum, tum!"

"Who sings?" cried Jim Fenton.

"Louis," was the answer.

"Where are you?"

Louis explained, and Jim Fenton cried out:

"Heaven be praised! I've found you, and, by thunder! I'll have you out in a jiffy!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

JIM TO THE RESCUE.

"I'll have you out in a jiffy!"

What welcome words for the two prisoners to hear!

"How did you get in?" Jim inquired.

"Down the chimney," answered Louis; "but it is blocked up now."

"Did you try to get out that way?"

"Yes, and a sooty mess we made of it."

"Just you keep calm; don't get scared if I fail first time! Now I know where you are, I'll have you out even if I have to put some dynamite under the walls and blow them up."

"And they would fall down on the top of us," said Louis, thinking Jim was speaking seriously.

Jim was in such good spirits that he could afford to joke.

"You must not mind a trifle like that," he answered, jocosely; "I will get you out, sound in wind and limb, if I can; but, if not—why, out you will come just the same."

Jim had not been a fireman for so long without knowing how to get into a building, even if it was as strong as a fortress.

He wished he had his ax with him, but wishes would not materialize in the form of a useful implement.

He searched around for a good, strong stick, which would act as a crowbar.

It was some time before he found anything which even looked strong enough, but finally, with a young tree—for such it was—he tried to force out the bars of the window, but they were too firmly imbedded in the stone.

He next experimented on the door with his foot, giving it such flat-footed kicks that it shook and trembled, but was still firmly closed.

"Well, I'm blessed if ever I saw such a place!" he ejaculated, as, with the perspiration pouring from every pore, he sat down to rest awhile.

He was too hot to whistle and too excited to sing.

To liberate the young people was harder than he had thought, but he was still positive he would get them out.

"I'm going to try the chimney," he shouted.

"You cannot get down."

"I'll try. Keep away from it, for down come the stones, if I can't get in any other way."

Jim climbed to the roof and looked carefully at the construction of the chimney.

He saw that it was strongly built, and, while small at the top, gradually enlarged until it opened in a good-sized fireplace.

One of the topmost stones had become loosened, and had fallen into the narrowest part of the chimney, wedging itself in so firmly that it seemed impossible to dislodge it.

Using his strong stick as a lever, Jim tried to hoist out the stone.

It resisted his efforts for a long time, but perseverance ever wins its reward, and he was rejoiced to see the stone arise an inch or so.

If only his stick did not break all would be well.

Fenton had forgotten that a lever is no use without a fulcrum, and while his lever did not break, his fulcrum did.

The stone which had formed the fulcrum for his lever became loosened and caused the stick to slip.

Instead of falling out, as it ought to have done, it fell inward and helped to wedge the other stone still firmer.

Jim walked around the chimney to find another fulcrum, but failed.

He then began tearing off the shingles and encountered a good proof of the excellent work done by our forefathers.

The great aim of builders in the present day is to get the work done as quickly as possible and at the least expense.

A century ago the motto was, "Do everything well," and the result was that buildings were erected substantially.

Jim grew impatient at the slowness with which he was able to rip off the cedar shingles.

Under them he found a strong sheathing which necessitated the tearing off of half the roof before an entrance could be effected.

Twice he left the shingles and returned to the chimney, only to find himself baffled.

Again he tried the roof, and at last managed to make a small opening just large enough for him to see through.

Louis shouted a loud "Hurrah!" at the sight of his friend's face.

Jim's eyes fell directly on the wall opposite, and he there saw the red hand.

A few words burst from him which were scarcely such as one would wish to see in print.

He felt deeply, and the words were the outcome of his feelings.

He worked hard on the roof, and managed to make a hole large enough to allow of his body passing through.

He dropped into the room and sat down on the floor to rest.

"You dear, good man, I am sure we have to thank you—oh, so much!" Elaine exclaimed, gushingly, as she grasped Jim's hand.

"It was all through Kafoozalum," Jim explained; "ever since Louis told me about the knights finding their ladyloves in dungeons deep and fortresses strong, through singing or playing, I thought I would find Louis by my whistling or the song."

"And you succeeded, Jim."

"Yes; but we have to get out, and that is more difficult than getting in."

"Rest a little before you try to get us out."

"Tell me, how did Madge take it?" asked Louis, more for the purpose of taking Jim's attention away from Elaine and the red hand, at which he gazed attentively.

Louis feared that his friend would have bad news concerning Clarence Burfield, and he did not want Elaine to be shocked.

The conversation was general until the fireman said that no one would recognize the wealthy heiress in the sooty, dirty young lady who had tried to climb chimneys.

That led her to ask about her father, and Jim told her that Mr. Burfield was all right, but worried about her absence.

"How is it that Wells Montgomery has not been looking for Miss Burfield?"

"He has, and is looking yet. But he might look until doomsday, and would not find her."

"Why?"

"Because he is a detective."

Elaine looked at Jim, and her eyes asked, just as plainly as could any words, for an explanation of the speech.

"Detectives fail oftener than they succeed. Why? Just because they form an opinion before they start, and they want to make the facts fit into the ruts they've made. When detectives succeed, the work is generally done for them by newspaper men or others, and the credit and dollars go to the men who didn't detect."

"What opinion did Wells Montgomery form about me?" asked Elaine.

"That I cannot say, but I will tell you what he thought about Louis."

"About me?"

"Yes; didn't I go to Mr. Burfield, and didn't he send me to the great detective with the message: 'Find the boy, and I'll pay the bill.' Well, I went, and he at once said: 'The boy is a bad lot——'"

"Thank you for telling me."

"Don't interrupt. A bad lot, he said, and you'll never see him again. Do not bother about him; he is not worth it."

"Then I am sure he had no good opinion of me, and I shall tell papa not to trust him again."

"No, Miss Burfield, detectives are very necessary, though they do not always succeed. They stimulate others, and so the work gets done."

Jim had been looking at the stone on which the red hand was printed all the while he was talking.

It had a fascination for him, and when he was a little rested, he crossed to it.

He hammered it with his hand.

"Just as I thought. It isn't stone at all. There's something behind all this. Here goes."

The last words were accompanied by a terrific blow on the imitation stone with a piece of stone which had fallen down the chimney.

There was a crash, the wood was splintered into fragments, and a small closet, only a few inches square, was disclosed.

In the closet were a few old newspapers and two or three scraps of paper on which were certain hieroglyphics and sign writing.

"If we had the key!" exclaimed Jim.

"I will find one," answered Louis.

"I didn't mean of the lock."

"No, neither did I. I referred to the cipher writing."

"We had better get away from here as soon as possible. If any of those double-dyed villains come and find that door smashed, they will serve our heads in the same manner."

There seemed to be no way but the roof, and it was no easy work.

By dint of hard work Jim made the opening larger, and enabled Louis to reach the roof.

Then, bidding Louis lie down on the roof so that he could help Elaine, Jim raised the girl in his arms and lifted her up, but he was not tall enough.

"Climb up on my shoulders."

Elaine tried several times before she was able to perform the acrobatic feat.

Louis caught her hands and dragged her up to the roof.

She was giddy when she saw the sloping roof, but nerved herself and stood as steadily as did Louis.

Jim clambered up, and all three descended to the ground in safety.

They had not left the shadow of the house when they heard some one open the door and enter.

They heard his exclamation as he saw that the prisoners had escaped, and trembled to think how near he was to them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BENDER'S FAILURES.

They had cause to tremble, for Bender was one of the most desperate men when in a bad temper.

And he was in an exceedingly bad one when he returned to the little prison house.

He had failed most miserably.

He had gone to the St. James Hotel to see Clarence Burfield, and met Wells Montgomery in the hall.

He knew the detective, but was not sure that Montgomery knew him, but it was risky to defy the detective.

However, he had asked for Burfield and Bender was not the man to funk.

Burfield received him very cordially.

"You came, as I believe, about my daughter?"

"Yes, Mr. Burfield, I saw your advertisement in the *Herald*, and I came to see you."

"Do you know where my daughter is?"

"Before I answer that let me explain. I am a poor man; I want money; if I can get enough I want to go to Europe to visit my father's family. What reward will you give?"

"It will be liberal."

"I think I can trust you. I do not know where your daughter is, but I overheard two men talking about her. They have her somewhere, and I know them."

"Well?"

"If I have a good reward promised I can purchase their secret—"

"Oh! Go on."

"And I am sure your daughter will be returned home safely, if they are satisfied."

"How much will they want?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"And you?"

"I should want more than that, because the work entails danger. Should I be suspected of having anything to do with you, I should most likely be killed."

"Killed?"

"Yes. You have read about the finding of the body of an Italian in the river?"

"No."

"Well, one has been found, and he had the red hand on him."

Clarence Burfield started at the mention of the horrid specter.

"What has that to do with me?"

"How can I say? I only know that the men who have your daughter spoke of the red hand."

"Well, name your figure."

"If you will give me twenty-five thousand dollars I will see the men and get the secret from them—"

"Don't go into details. The money shall be yours. Go and see Wells Montgomery; he has the matter in hand. I will give you a note to him."

Bender knew not what to do. He dare not see the detective, and yet, unless he consented to do so, he was afraid Burfield might have him watched and perhaps arrested.

"I do not like dealing with detectives; they get all the glory and most of the dollars," Bender remarked.

"Just as you like. I have placed the matter in his hands, and have promised to send every one who answers the advertisement to him."

"Give me a note to him."

"There is no reason why you should hesitate. I will give you all you ask if by your agency my daughter is returned to me uninjured."

"I will trust you."

Burfield took a card and merely wrote on the back the words:

"Introducing the bearer to Wells Montgomery."

As Bender passed through the office he saw Laster, a well-known detective, Montgomery's assistant, watching him closely.

"I am being shadowed," he thought; and his heart beat faster. In reality it was his guilty conscience which made him believe he was watched.

Montgomery and Laster were both looking for some one else, and had no real suspicion of the man whose conscience accused him.

Bender walked to the nearest elevated station and took the car for South Ferry.

It was one of the best places in the city for the evasion of the detectives.

He passed down the steps leading into the Staten Island Ferry, and cut into the street. He entered the South Ferry house, came out and went up the elevated stairs again.

When he took his seat in a Third Avenue car he felt free, for he knew he was no longer followed.

He opened the evening paper, the first edition of which was then on sale, and saw the scare headlines about the finding of the body of the Italian.

Although he had read about it in one of the other papers half an hour before, he was startled when the picture of a hand confronted him.

"Poor fellow! He won't tell any tales, will he?"

The speaker sat on Bender's right, and as Bender looked at him he recognized Ruskovich, a Russian member of the Red Hand League.

The two fellow-conspirators talked on nearly every subject save that of the murder.

By implied consent they were mute on that topic.

Bender was very much gratified when Ruskovich got out at Grand Street, for he thought the Russian was shadowing him in the interest of the Red Hand.

Everything that day ended in failure, and he was nearly mad with rage when he started to Hoboken to try and make terms with Elaine.

When he arrived there and found that his prisoners had escaped he swore in terms far from polite and certainly unfit for repetition.

He saw that the closet had been broken into, and that worried him.

In his pocket he carried a little brass tube about six inches long.

It was sealed at both ends, but on the one end was a string rolled up, and which, unrolled, might measure five or six yards.

He unfastened the string, and then placed the brass tube in the hole which had been the secret hiding place of Red Hand documents.

This done, he struck a match and lighted the cord, which was really a fuse.

Jim saw him do this, for the fireman had worked his way around to the door and watched the conspirator.

Fenton knew then that the place was to be blown up, and Elaine and Louis were close to it and in great danger.

He might shout to them to run, or try and extinguish the fuse.

With a sudden spring he was on Bender's back, forcing him to the ground.

The men fought; they wrestled and rolled over and over, both, for the time, forgetting the fuse.

Its sputtering attracted Jim's attention, and, breaking loose from Bender's grasp, he tried to seize the fuse, but his foot slipped and he failed.

Louis had heard the scuffling and went around to see what it meant.

He saw Jim get up and run toward him.

"Run for your life! Tell Elaine to run!"

The girl had followed Louis, and all three did run, as they never had before.

They were followed closely by Bender, who fired several shots after them.

A loud explosion startled them, and looking back they saw that the old strong house built by the colonists had been destroyed.

Jim caught Elaine in his arms. He was a strong, powerful fellow, and she was as light as a feather, as he afterward declared.

She put her arms around his neck and held him tightly, for she had become nervous and almost hysterical.

Bender knew that unless he could overtake and capture his late prisoners in a few minutes they would be close to the houses on the outskirts of Hoboken and beyond his reach.

He had reloaded his pistol, which was a heavy one and capable of carrying a long distance, and in desperation fired all five of the chambers in quick succession.

Jim was behind Louis, for he was handicapped by the weight of the young heiress, and the last shot fired by Bender caused him to experience a sharp, stinging sensation in one of his legs.

He did not stop to find out what was the matter, but when he was able to examine he saw that a little hole had been bored through the fleshy part of his calf, and that he had had a narrow escape from serious injury.

A few minutes more and the three entered Hoboken.

At the nearest hotel Jim engaged rooms, and advised Elaine to have a good wash and a rest until her father could send for her.

Louis was advised to do the same thing, and Jim promised to lose no time in reaching Clarence Burfield and acquainting him with the good news.

"Don't show yourselves to any one," said Jim, at parting. "No one knows any one nowadays."

With this oracular remark he saw each one in a room, ordered refreshments to be sent up, varying the order slightly, for Jim knew the young heiress would appreciate a cup of tea and some nice toast better than anything else under the circumstances. To Louis he sent a good, large plate of roast beef and a cup of coffee.

How refreshing was a wash! But Elaine felt far from comfortable when she had to put on again the torn and dirty frock.

CHAPTER XXV.

"GONE."

"Where is she? Tell me all. I am nearly mad with anxiety!" exclaimed Clarence Burfield, when Jim Fenton, who had called at his hotel, announced to him that his daughter was safe.

"It is a long story, sir, but I will tell you all I know as we go to her. She is in Hoboken."

"A prisoner?"

"No."

"I will go with you, Fenton."

Burfield left the parlor to make some arrangements, and promised to be back in a few minutes, but it was nearly half an hour before he returned.

"Oh, sir, may I speak with you?"

"Certainly, Frances; what is it? I am in a very great hurry."

Frances Meredith had met her mistress' father in the hall and had so accosted him.

"Please, Mr. Burfield, do not have anything to do with that fireman."

"Which fireman?"

"Fenton. Father says he used to know him in the South, and at that time he—Fenton, I mean—was a member of some society that murdered people."

"Tut, tut, girl! There are no such societies."

"Not the Red Hand, sir?"

"What do you know of that?"

"Nothing, sir, only father says he knew Fenton used to be a member of that society, and when I told father of the red hand on my nightgown, he said that we were all to be murdered, for that was what the sign meant."

"Was your father a member? Is he a member?"

"Oh, no; I am sure he could not be. He would never belong to such a society, but he was frightened and told me about the fireman."

"Thank you, my girl, for warning me. I will be very careful."

He left the maid and went down to the office.

He dispatched a special messenger to Wells Montgomery, asking him to have a good man at the hotel at once, to follow the little party to Hoboken.

The millionaire apologized for the delay when he returned to the parlor, and declared he was ready to accompany Fenton to Hoboken.

As they passed through the office Burfield saw Montgomery's right-hand man, Laster.

To the bell boy Burfield said, in a loud voice:

"Get me a coach, boy, to take me to Hoboken."

Laster took the hint, and, when Burfield and the fireman entered the coach, he called another and ordered the driver to follow the first one, and on no account let it get out of sight.

Not a word was spoken in the coach.

The ferry was crossed and the streets of Hoboken traversed.

The first coach stepped at the small hotel where Fenton had bade Elaine and Louis to stay until his return.

Fenton's face was beaming.

"Now, sir, you will see whether I have been false to you or not."

All three entered the hotel and the clerk was all politeness and suavity.

"Seen the lady, sir? She said you would pay the bill; she had lost her pocketbook."

"What are you talking about?"

"The young lady with the sooty face and the boy with his torn clothes you left here—"

"What of them?"

"Gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, an hour ago. The lady said she had lost her pocketbook, but you would pay the bill. Of course I was too fly to believe that, so she left me a ring; it is worth as much as the bill, and if you pay all right you takes the ring; if not—well, we're square."

Burfield stepped forward.

"Let me see the ring."

"Certainly, sir."

"It is my daughter's ring," said Burfield, when he looked at it. "I gave it to her on her birthday."

"So she said, sir."

"How much is the bill?"

"Four dollars and thirty cents, sir."

"What for?" asked Fenton, interposing at that juncture.

"Two rooms and extras."

"I will pay you. Give me a receipted bill and the ring."

When this had been done Burfield asked Fenton what he proposed next.

"I don't know, sir. Let me talk to the clerk. You can hear all I have to say."

He asked all about the manner in which Elaine left, and was sure from the answers that Louis had some good reason for leaving so suddenly and unceremoniously.

"Let us go back to New York, sir; they may have arrived at your hotel before this."

"It seems the only thing we can do."

Fenton was miserable on the return journey, while Burfield believed some more foul play had been the cause of his daughter's flight from the Hoboken hotel.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ADVENTURES.

Jim had not been gone from the hotel long before Louis looked from the bedroom window, even risking being seen by the enemies who had deprived him of liberty.

He saw a man watching the windows of the hotel, and wondered where he had seen him before.

A fortunate chance threw a ray of light on the man's face, and Louis at once recognized Bender.

There was danger to them if their enemy knew where they were staying, and Louis wanted to be sure Elaine was safe.

He knocked at her door.

"May I come in?"

"Yes."

She had locked the door, but now unfastened it to admit her young friend.

"I am afraid we are discovered."

"What causes you to think so?"

"Bender is watching the house."

"Then we are lost."

"Perhaps not."

"What are we to do?"

"You stay here until I can find some way of escape. I will not be long."

"Be careful, Louis, for my sake."

"I will be very careful."

Louis heard her lock the door before he went downstairs.

He was not afraid of Bender recognizing him, and would not have hesitated in passing close to the man, but it was necessary, for Elaine's sake, that he should be cautious.

He found that there was a rear entrance to the hotel from a side street, and he left by that door.

He walked leisurely around to where Bender was standing, and saw for the first time that a little distance away was another man, who was communicating with Bender by signs and occasionally by speech.

"We have them trapped," he heard Bender say.

"Yes, and when they leave we nab them all."

"Of course. That fireman has gone to fetch the old man, so we get all three."

Louis felt alarmed, for he did not know how many confederates Bender might have gathered in the interval.

He was relieved when, a minute later, he heard his arch enemy invite the other into a saloon to have a drink.

"They can't get away without us seeing," he said, "and we shall not act until the old man arrives."

The two men entered a saloon nearly opposite the hotel, and Louis hurried back to tell Elaine what he had heard.

She decided that it would be well to leave at once, and, as we already know, she left her ring as a pledge of payment for the bill incurred, as she had lost her pocketbook.

Leaving the hotel by the rear door, they walked some little distance before they dared to speak.

They were not followed, of that they were sure, so they felt safe to discuss their future action.

"Have you any money, Louis?"

"Not a cent."

"Neither have I."

"I made a mistake," corrected Louis; "I have a nickle, just enough for you to reach the ferry."

"And you?"

"Will walk."

"No; we will both walk. Besides, I think we will need the nickle to pay our ferry fares."

"Yes; we couldn't walk across the Hudson."

"No; and I cannot swim."

They were as happy as children out for a holiday, and Elaine threw aside her young lady reserve and acted more youthfully than Louis.

"Come along, then; let us walk to the ferry."

"Which way?"

"I don't know."

"We must ask."

A car passed just at that moment, and on it the words "passes all ferries" caught their eyes.

They felt safe in following the car track, never thinking that a car from the interior might pass the ferries, and that by following the track, it would be possible to go inland instead of toward the river.

After walking for half an hour or more, they asked a man the way to the ferry.

He laughed at them.

He muttered something about jays, and asked if they wanted the ferry across the Ohio, or perhaps it was the ferry at 'Frisco.

Louis was indignant, and the man thought he had perhaps gone a little too far and had allowed his joking to be insulting.

"If you want to reach New York," he said, "you must turn around, for you are walking away from the Hudson."

He directed them to the ferry and they thanked him.

Louis took Elaine's hand, and like children they walked along, forgetful of all their troubles.

After some time they met a woman, and Elaine asked:

"Is this the way to the ferry?"

"Yes; keep straight on."

They did so, but the river was a long way off.

When they did reach it they were so tired that they could scarcely stand.

Both felt ready to cry when they found they had reached Weehawken.

The fare was three cents, and they had only a nickle, but Louis persuaded the man to allow them to go for the five cents, and they crossed the river to Forty-second Street.

It was quite a walk to the St. James Hotel, and several times they rested.

Once they called a cab and asked the driver to take them to the St. James, but their dirty and torn clothes made him ask for the money in advance, and as they could not give it he spoke insultingly and drove on.

Elaine was too sensitive to ask any other cabman, and so they walked on across town to Broadway.

The distance seemed interminable, but by dint of strong will the great thoroughfare was reached, and the bright lights of upper Broadway fascinated them and made them forget their weariness.

Just as they reached the door of the hotel, ready to drop, Clarence Burfield and Jim Fenton alighted from the coach.

They had been delayed through going to see Wells Montgomery, and from his residence to police headquarters.

"Papa!" shouted Elaine.

"Elaine, my darling, how came you here?"

"Walked; and, oh, we are so tired!"

She proved the truth of her words by sinking down on the sidewalk, thoroughly overcome with the lack of food and over-exertion.

Louis had felt the reaction also, and had fallen against one of the light posts, unable to move.

Assistance was procured, and Frances was delighted to have her mistress back once more, while Burfield personally attended to Louis.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DIPLOMATIC SUCCESS.

Louis Stanhope had been very fond of puzzles, and had been successful in working out some of the most difficult published in the papers which devoted space to the intricacies of brain-twisting problems.

He had, after a bath and supper, returned to Jim Fenton's flat, where he was welcomed by Madge, though she tried very hard to appear cross with him.

Jim's leave of absence had expired, and he very happily returned to his duty as a fireman.

He scarcely ever ceased singing "Oh! Kafoozalum!" and he had every reason to be proud of his accomplishment.

He sang it so often and so loudly that first day of his return to the engine house that he became a nuisance.

"One would think you a Mario or a Campanini," said one of the firemen, "the way you sing."

"I am better than either."

"I should say so. There is nothing like conceit."

"Well, you'd be conceited if you could get a thousand dollars for a song."

"Who did?"

"I did. See here, my boys, look at this."

Jim drew a greasy pocketbook from his shirt and took therefrom a slip of paper about six inches long and less than three inches wide.

As the boys looked at it they read an order on a national bank to pay to "James Fenton or order the sum of one thousand dollars."

"What was it for, Jim?"

"Singing that song."

"You can't fool us. Tell the truth, can't you?"

"It is the truth."

Jim, however, told them how his singing had found the heiress and his own young friend, and how the father of Elaine was so grateful that he pressed him to accept the check.

And while Jim was singing at the engine house and showing his check for a thousand dollars, Louis was trying to decipher the writings he had found in the mysterious hole in the wall of his recent prison house.

He was still desirous of bringing the Red Hand conspirators to justice, but the clew to their identity was as difficult to find as ever.

Clarence Burfield had wanted Louis to live with him and become his adopted son.

"No, sir. I have a work to do; let me do it in my own way."

"But, my boy, you are wasting your youth. Let us go to Europe and there begin a life which cannot be interfered with by the Red Hand or any other body of miscreants."

"Give me a little time, sir."

"How long do you want?"

"Until March."

"Two months?"

"Yes, sir; that is not long."

"You will allow me to provide you with money during that time?"

"Yes, sir. I cannot live without, and if I work I am afraid I shall have but little time for my detective duties."

"If you fail in the time you will relinquish the work?"

"I will, sir."

"On those terms I agree. Keep out of danger and come to see us often."

Louis worked night and day over the cryptographs, but was unable to decipher the writing.

Week after week passed, and every clew which led, as he thought, to the identity of the conspirators failed.

He was in despair, his head was aching, when Madge Fenton called to him:

"Louis, I am going to make a call. Will you come?"

Louis had no inclination to give up his work, but he was gallant enough to accept with pleasure the invitation given by a pretty girl.

"Where are you going, Madge?"

"To see Mrs. Camp."

"I do not know her."

"Don't you? Well, you know her niece."

"Are you her niece?"

"No, you silly fellow. Am I the only girl you know?"

"You are the prettiest," answered Louis, gallantly.

"Thank you for the compliment. You know Frances Meredith?"

"No."

"Yes, you do. She is maid to Miss Burfield."

"Oh!"

"Well, Mrs. Camp is her aunt."

Genial Mrs. Camp had a hearty welcome for Madge and Louis, whom she was really pleased to see, because he was still spoken of as a true hero.

"I wish George was here; he would be pleased to see you. But I don't know what to make of him, he is off his head most of the time."

Mrs. Camp rattled on about her brother, and Louis, who was not interested, had, boy-like, picked up a book and was turning over its pages.

He almost shouted as he saw a slip of paper, evidently put into the book hurriedly.

There was nothing remarkable about that, but on the paper were certain designs, and in each design a letter.

It was a key to a cipher.

Though there were thousands of different cryptographs, Louis could only think of one, and that was the one adopted by the Red Hand.

He managed to slip the paper into his pocket and pretended to be very interested in the book.

When he reached home he tried the key and found that it was the very thing he wanted.

Written in the cipher were several names, and among them that of Bender and Van Ness.

He remembered hearing that name somewhere, and tried hard to recall it.

After puzzling for some time, he started out for a walk, and

once more tried to find the house to which he had been first taken as a prisoner.

He walked up and down the streets, looking at the houses, but one looked so much like another that there was no way by which he could identify his prison.

Just when despair seized him, and he was about to go home for the day, he began unconsciously singing, "Oh! Kafoozalum."

A young girl heard him, put her head out of the window, and recognized Louis.

She was so pleased that she could not resist taking up the refrain and singing:

"Daily the troubadour sang

Oh! kafoozalum!

Till he became as old

As Methusalem."

Louis stood still to listen. He could not see the singer, but the voice was familiar.

"Daily the troubadour sang,

Quite overcome;

Autograph, epitaph,

Rum, tum, tum!"

Louis heard another voice, louder and rather more mature, say: "For shame of yourself, Elmina! One would think you wanted to attract attention."

"It's Louis, mamma."

"Well, what if it is? You must never mention that you have ever seen him, Elmina."

The window was closed, the voices were no longer audible to Louis, but he knew the house now.

All came to him as clear as the noonday sun.

Elmina was the name of the girl who had enabled him to escape.

He asked a storekeeper the name of the party living in the house, and was staggered when told that the house was occupied by Jacob Van Ness.

Louis boldly went back to the house and rang the bell.

"I wish to see Miss Van Ness."

"What for?"

It was Mrs. Van Ness who opened the door, and she recognized Louis.

"If you will allow me to enter I will be pleased to tell you. I have a message for your daughter."

"Come in."

Louis was once more in the house where he had been kept a prisoner.

He was shown into a small parlor, and left alone.

A few minutes later Elmina entered with her mother.

Louis thanked the girl for aiding his escape.

She appeared to be unable to understand him.

"You must be mistaken sir," said Mrs. Van Ness.

Louis smiled, but again thanked them both.

Then he drew nearer to them and in a whisper he said:

"All is known. Mr. Van Ness is liable to be arrested at any moment—"

"What for?" asked the wife.

"What has father done?" inquired the daughter.

"The Red Hand—"

"Don't mention it, please. My husband is perhaps dying. He is injured, it may be fatally, all through obeying the orders—"

"Mamma, don't exaggerate. Papa is in bed with a broken leg, but he will recover, the doctor says."

"May I see him?"

"No."

"Then tell him all the books of the society are in our hands. We know the members. Tell him—"

"What?"

A masculine voice had uttered the word, and after a pause, shouted:

"Come here and to my face say all you have to say."

Louis was taken into the back parlor, where he found Jacob Van Ness lying on a cot, his leg held in a cradle suspended from the ceiling.

"What books are you talking about?" he asked.

"The archives of the Red Hand."

"No one can read them."

"Yes, I can."

"How?"

"I have the key."

"Where did you get it?"

Louis looked at the man and saw on his face a look of honesty which did not accord with his connection with the Red Hand society.

"You know George Meredith——"

A spasm of pain was visible on the sick man's face as Louis fired the random shot.

"Has he—I mean—have you the key?"

"I have."

"Then the jig is up. Elmina, my dear, I never meant for you to be ashamed of your father. I was led into it, and—but I'll make no excuses. I suppose I will end my days in prison."

"Mr. Van Ness, I have an offer to make. You are one of the council of the League. Call the other members together. Tell them that they can disband the League, or end their days in jail."

"If the Red Hand is disbanded?"

"Then all will go free."

"But suppose the disbanding was not real?"

"I know what you mean. Each one will have to sign a confession of guilt. If the Red Hand is heard of again the confession will be used, and, no matter where the members may be, they can be extradited."

"You say they are all known?"

"Not all, but most."

Louis saw he had scored a point, and he continued:

"I will give you until to-morrow, six o'clock, to decide. Every one known to belong to the Red Hand is shadowed. Escape is impossible. Consent to my terms, and nothing will ever be said against you; refuse, and all will have to answer for their crimes. Escape from jail is impossible."

Van Ness and Meredith had long wished to break away from the League, and an opportunity was now offered.

Louis had done what the police of a dozen States had failed to accomplish.

Before a week had passed he had received the confessions of all the council members. Some were more guilty than others, but as far as the confessions went, those who had actually committed the murders were dead or in foreign lands.

Louis had the hearty approval of Burfield, and even Wells Montgomery praised him for his diplomacy.

The Red Hand was disbanded.

By some strange influence the announcement was made all through the States and accepted by the members.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BON VOYAGE.

Fenton received a check from Clarence Burfield because he had assisted Louis in unraveling the mysteries of the Red Hand.

A month was spent very pleasantly in the Empire City by the happy family.

Burfield had legally adopted Louis as his son, and by deed of gift placed a hundred thousand dollars to his credit.

The papers mentioned the millionaire's generosity and wondered at the poor boy's great luck.

They did not know how a dangerous band of criminals had been scattered and rendered powerless for the future.

On the day before the Burfields sailed for Europe, Van Ness called on Clarence Burfield and told him a strange story.

He was reminded of a duel he had fought years before, and which duel was the primary cause of the Red Hand vendetta.

"Jacques Bonard was killed by you," said Van Ness. "His brother was one of the founders of the Red Hand. A vendetta was sworn against you. A cousin of Bonard married your sister——"

"It is true."

"The vendetta was relaxed, but you cast off your sister. You knew she was poor, you knew her husband was sick most of the time. Still you would not relent. Then the Red Hand took up

the vendetta again, but you were not killed. It was hoped you would repent. Your sister wrote you saying her husband was dead. You made no answer——"

"I never received the letter. I swear I never did."

"Then the order went forth that you and all belonging to you must die. That order has failed. You are free. The vendetta has ended, and you have been saved by your sister's child."

"I—don't understand."

"Your sister married——"

"Frank Craven."

"Yes, Frank Louis Stanhope Craven. When you cast off your sister he dropped his first given name and his surname and lived and died Louis Stanhope."

"Then Louis——"

"Is your nephew. I have come into possession of all the facts, and this miniature——"

Louis entered the room just as Van Ness was handing a peculiar miniature to Burfield.

"Where did you get that?" he asked, excitedly.

"Who is it, Louis? To whom does it belong?"

"It is mine. It is my mother's portrait. I did not know I had lost it. I have not lost it! See, I have one just like it."

He produced his own facsimile.

The medallion was of a woman's face shaded by angel's wings, and was an exact replica of the one handed to Burfield by Van Ness.

"My son, my Louis. You little knew what you did when you swung from the telegraph wire to save my daughter. You saved your own cousin. I am really your uncle. You have performed wonders, for you have killed a vendetta which has lasted twenty-one years. My boy, I am proud of you. I hope your mother in heaven is able to look down and see how I have suffered through my treatment of her, and how rejoiced I am to embrace her son. Elaine, come here, my dear. Louis is really your cousin."

Van Ness was well paid for the proofs he had secured, and on the following day a happy party left New York for the Old World.

There was no fear to haunt the Burfields. The Red Hand would only be a memory with them, and Elaine declared that if it had not been for the Red Hand vendetta she would never have known her cousin.

Frances Meredith accompanied Elaine as maid, her father staying in New York to commence a new life of honor and usefulness.

As the steamer left the dock a sealed envelope was given to Louis, who found its contents to be merely the words: "Shun political secret societies, and never allow yourself to consent to a crime."

There was no signature, but in its place was the seal of the Red Hand, and under it the words:

"Nevermore will the seal be used. The Red Hand has been overcome."

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 43, will contain, "Matt, the Fugitive; or, the Witch Doctor's Prophecy." The story deals with a boy who had some of the strangest adventures that ever fell to the lot of man. Joining a gypsy band and becoming a fugitive from justice, he wandered about in the wild lands near New Orleans. He slept one night on his own tombstone. If you want to find out how that happened, read the story. Then there is an old Creole witch doctor—a voodoo prophet. Did his prophecies come true? Well, again we tell you to read the story.

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